

Stinger Saga



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How the air battle was fought and won in Afghanistan

Mahmood Ahmed

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This book is dedicated to all officers, junior commissioned officers and men of Pakistan Army, and all those Afghan Mujahideen who were affiliated with the Stinger Programme and were in fact one of those . . .

‘ . . . who struck the first blow . . . ’

Acknowledgement

Col Muhammad Khan, a very famous Urdu writer, is known for his humorous articles. In one of his very popular Urdu book, *Bajang Amad* (a book about military life written in such a witty style that the book is now considered as a classic in Urdu humorous literature), he had very correctly inferred that ‘ . . . any book can somehow be written, if one has the determination. But the problems start only, when it is to be published. Generally a book is only published after a lot of nudging and prodding by friends, well-wishers, relatives etc.’ He had been very correct; as such, that has been the case with this book also. After giving this narration a book form, it lay dormant on my table for quite some time, mostly because of my lethargic nature. Only when the pushing and jabbing by my well-wishers got so intense and serious, that I could not ignore their concerns any longer, that I thought seriously about its publication. It is indeed to all those friends and well-wishers that the real credit of getting this book written and then published goes.



However, I must admit that there were some who sincerely advised me to get the draft approved and vetted by the army. Taking my cue from Brigadier Yousaf (author of the book *The Bear Trap*), who thought that such an act would have been like kiss of death for all efforts, I decided to follow him and ignored all such advice.

Finally, though I had mostly used my notes and records that I had kept with me, I am also deeply indebted to all of my colleagues and friends who had constantly prodded and encouraged me to write this

account, especially those officers and men who, as they relived those fateful days again and again with me, managed to correct many events and kept my heading true. It would be very difficult for me to acknowledge all those gentlemen individually. However, I would particularly like to mention here the name of Col Sultan Amir who actually went through the first draft of this narrative and also corrected and encouraged me a lot in this.

Col Sultan Amir was more commonly known as Colonel Imam. He was totally dedicated to the Afghan cause and was considered more or less a father figure amongst the Afghan Mujahideen in the early days. He was quite instrumental in the deployment of the Stingers and was their main trainer. He was much respected by the Afghan Mujahideen and also by those CIA officers who used to work in Pakistan in those days. However, after the 9/11 incident there was a change of thinking in the USA. The new CIA staff that had replaced old American staff, particularly, started suspecting him, along with others, for having some sort of links with the Taliban—a line which was towed by many in Pakistan also, perhaps just to please the Americans. He was unfortunately kidnapped in Waziristan when he had accompanied a British TV team. He was captured by an unknown and unheard splinter group of Pakistani Talibans, who eventually killed him in cold blood on some trumped-up charges, after they had failed to get any ransom for his release. This happened despite efforts by many Afghan Mujahideen groups to get him released. Before he left for Waziristan in 2010, I had met him and shown him the manuscript of this book. He was very excited about the book; he had read and corrected the first draft. He also wanted to revise and discuss other aspects of the book after his return from Waziristan. But this was not to be as fate had something else in store for him.

Particularly touching has been the support and interest taken in the whole project by my family, especially my nieces, Anum Waseem Baig and Aliya Waseem. Anum, who is doing her O-levels, managed to appoint herself my proofreader, editor-in-chief, book composer, and English teacher all at one time. Surprisingly, she proved a rather hard taskmaster, a trait that I had not noticed till then, and I felt that she thoroughly enjoyed criticising my work and chastising me a lot for my poor literary skills. This book would not have been in the shape it is without her efforts. This book is also dedicated to their sincere efforts with all my appreciation.

Introduction

For undemocratic reasons and motives not of State, they arrive at their conclusions largely inarticulate. Being void of self-expression they confide their views to none; but sometimes in a smoking room, one learns why things were done.

(Rudyard Kipling)

I think it would be most appropriate for me to explain right at the outset my reasons for this narration concerning the role of the Stinger in the Afghan War and how it came to be written about.

This book is about the time I spent in the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) from December 1984 to August 1993 (more than eight years). It is about how things happened and what role different organisations played during those days. It is mainly about the Soviet and Afghan airpower and how it was effectively countered by a ragtag Afghan guerrilla army supported by the ISI of Pakistan. In due course, it also revealed the characteristics of different people and organisations, which had played a crucial part in those days. Perhaps it can give us a clearer and better understanding of the events as they had happened and may act as a guideline in our future dealings.

This perhaps is the first account of events as seen by low—or middle-level officers and men. As normally happens, such books or accounts as published by top senior or elder persons, however accurate and enthralling these may be, are often at variance with the views of men who actually do the job and, as they say, are in the ‘rut of the things’. A senior officer who is mostly busy in operations room or involved in higher strategic discussions, after many deliberations, may simply, just say a few words to let the chain of events start. He may say something like ‘Start the Stinger Training School by the end of the month,’ or ‘Collect Mujahideen

from such and such place and start their training,’ and the rest is then left to the low—or middle-level officers and men to sort out and carry out the mission. It is left to their ability as to how well they understand the mission and their capability and initiative in achieving the desired results. If everything goes smoothly, all is well and good, and if something goes wrong, then the poor fellows are hauled up, and they generally end up taking all the blame. As is obvious, that in such an eventuality, it is generally the failure of men and not plans that is blamed.

To my mind, I have not come upon a single book written by someone from the low or middle ranks about these events. The nearest book I came across, to that accord, is perhaps *The Bear Trap* written by Brigadier Yousaf (late). This was, to my mind, the first book written by someone who was a professional soldier and was actually involved in the events. He also happened to be my director in the ISI. I could not somehow meet Brigadier Yousaf after he had left the army and had his book (*The Bear Trap*) published. I am sure he would have enjoyed knowing that at least some visiting CIA senior officials passed rather scathing remarks about *The Bear Trap* right in my presence. Why? Because Brigadier Yousaf, being a professional soldier, had rather a very mediocre opinion of some of the US soldiers and CIA staff. And he had mentioned that, quite plainly, in his book. The Americans had not liked that. It was a direct attack on their super-power ego. Surprisingly, at the same time, they (the visiting CIA officials) also asked me if I could get them some more copies of the book as it was not available in the USA.

In the following pages I have tried to give an authentic and as accurate an account of events as possible. During my more than eight years of stay in the ISI, I was in charge of Stinger training and as an extension responsible for countering Soviet and Afghan air power. I was the first one with my team to be sent to the USA by the ISI for training and, later on, had the honour of training about 1400 Afghan Mujahideen in its use. Thus I was responsible for training, issuing, and deployment of Stingers and had also kept the entire record for this weapon system. These records and data were periodically passed on to CIA by the ISI. They regularly tallied and physically checked their records with us. I remained there, in the ISI, till the Stinger School in the ISI was finally closed down.

Because of my position, I had access to most of the data about Stingers, their training, and their results. I had also kept certain notes or journals which I wrote during those days, for I knew even then that we were living

through very important historical times and events. Indeed, we were part of it. I was also a personal witness to many events that took place during those days. Luckily I was also deputed by my section to maintain a sort of 'Log of Events' about our section, which due to security concerns had to be hand written personally by me. I maintained it for a number of years till I was posted out from the ISI. By then it had finally comprised of a number of volumes. At the moment I do not know where they are, perhaps lying in some cupboard somewhere in our old section, gathering dust or gone up in ashes. This naturally was of great help when I was compiling this narration though, strangely, when I requested for access to those volumes written by me, was firmly, though politely, refused.

The events which have been narrated have been taken from the personal journals or notes that I had kept and mostly out of memory. Thus, out of necessity, this book is not the outcome of many references to different articles, papers, etc. published by different journalists or analysts. To my best ability, I have adhered to facts only. And I have tried to give each event its true character. Though I must admit that in doing so, I may have at times used strong expressions which may not be palatable for some. But I felt it necessary to depict the true character and characteristics of the persons or the events. My intention, and it is also one of the objectives that induced me to publish this book, is to present the life and events as seen by low—and middle-level officers and men in those turbulent days. Thus the narration is covering both the lighter and the darker side of the events.

There may be some parts of the book, especially in the first few chapters, that may be difficult to understand by the general readers (that is non-military persons). For example, it may sound Greek to some, when talking of the silent-laying practice, dome trainer, or the difference between hang fire, misfire, or dud missiles, which is normal talk for soldiers. Thus the first few chapters, out of necessity, would be of more interest to military analysts and researchers.

I had come across a number of analysts and writers commenting on the air warfare in Afghanistan. And unfortunately none had the access to the kind of data needed for such assessments. I especially found out that the many so-called experts and writers had no or very little knowledge about the 'Stingers' and its performance and as to what crucial part it played in the Afghan War. It was soon clear that many writers had only a vague idea of how things had happened and often put their own imagination and their biases to work, thus often muddling the truth.

After my retirement, often, while talking with old comrades and friends we realised how concocted were the views of some of them, maybe because of ignorance or perhaps their wrong perceptions or interpretations of the events. I was, in fact, prodded and urged on by many of my friends and acquaintances, both in the civil and the military, into writing the true account of these events as witnessed and experienced by me and in this way to set the records straight.

This book again, as I had mentioned earlier, is not essentially a historical book, but I have tried my best to be accurate and honest with the narration. I have tried to explain how things happened, why they happened like that, and what used to be the word in 'langar' (cookhouse or mess) amongst junior officers and men in those days.

I left the ISI in 1993 and retired from army in 1997, enough time I guess when history can be written by professionals. Since then, many things have been declassified and what used to be secret in those days, have now become common knowledge. Every now and then, one comes across some new books or movies about the Afghan War and most, if not all, claiming to be true account of the events.

Eventually, the advice of my friends and well-wishers led me to take this narrative to the print.

However, in the end, I am also convinced that this book may eventually serve some useful purpose if studied in its true perspective. Many of the facts can be got corrected with the help of this book. The American air defence artillery was rather very quick about it. The American air defence had picked up quite a few things about Stingers and its performance that I have mentioned in this book and eventually published it in one of their own air defence journals. They had sent their own air defence experts to analyse its performance; they stayed a number of days here with us, interviewed most of the commanders, and held long and useful discussions with our trainers. I was impressed by their keenness and felt rather at a loss, at the lack of same interest by our own air defence organisation.

I have also tried to highlight the characteristics of different intelligence organisations, especially of the CIA. How the ISI and the CIA used to work in those days, and what type of persons it composed of. This might eventually help us in understanding and dealing with them in our future interactions. If so, then I would consider that this book would have served some useful purpose.

I also felt very strongly obliged to acknowledge the efforts and sacrifices of the common soldiers, low—and mid-level ranking officers, and

men who played a very crucial but silent role in bringing about ‘the miracle of the twentieth century’ as espoused by General Zia-ul-Haq (ex-president of Pakistan). It has also been my endeavour to highlight, how the common officers and men of Pakistan Army worked. It is about these persons who had no bright careers in the eyes of Military Secretary’s Branch in GHQ. It is these men and their strong convictions that had actually forced the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. These were the men who were warned in clear terms that if captured or wounded in hostile territory, they were on their own as the government, because of political reasons, was bound to deny them. And still they went, willingly and voluntarily. Why? What was their motivation? I can think of only one reason. The love for their country and their strong faith. Promotions and higher positions had been lost to most of them. This mission had given them a strong sense of purpose and a chance to prove their worth. I remember very well, when one officer, a colleague of mine, who was awarded a medal for his services, surprisingly seemed rather sad on hearing the news. Later on, privately, he confided to me that ‘he never worked for such honours and awards and wanted all awards from God Almighty in the next world only’. This was the conviction of most of them in those days.

The Beginning

First Encounter

It was on 2 August 1985 at about 0900 AST (Afghanistan Standard Time), I along with my two NCOs (non-commissioned officers) and a couple of Mujahids had left Zakhel Village and were climbing up to reach the top of the mountain. I was keen to reach the top from where I could get a better view of the Kabul City. I, along with my team, had already stayed two nights consecutively in the village (which was deserted at the time), and I knew that it was now becoming extremely dangerous for us to stay there any longer. I was accompanied by Hajji Abdul Haq (he was later killed by the Taliban in the year 2001), a very famous commander of Younis Khalis's party. He had met us in the village and had arranged for our stay. He was now accompanying us to the top.

Zakhel was a small village comprising of about fifteen to twenty houses, mostly made of earth and mud, though some were constructed of bricks and stones. The village had a strong underground shelter constructed nearby, where mostly women and children took cover during the bombings and shelling. The village was located about twenty kilometres SE (South East) of Kabul City and was at the foot of Shalkay Ghar Mountain. When earlier we had reached the village, it was almost totally empty in anticipation of a Soviet and Afghan search-and-destroy mission that was expected sometime soon. Earlier we had watched with great concern the few families that were left behind hastily vacating the village. The mountain was basically stony and rocky, mostly barren with not much vegetation around. The top of the hill gave a very commanding view of Kabul City and its suburbs. It was very easy to observe the famous Kabul-Logar Road and built-up areas of 'Chehelsotun' and 'Darulaman', etc. in the city.





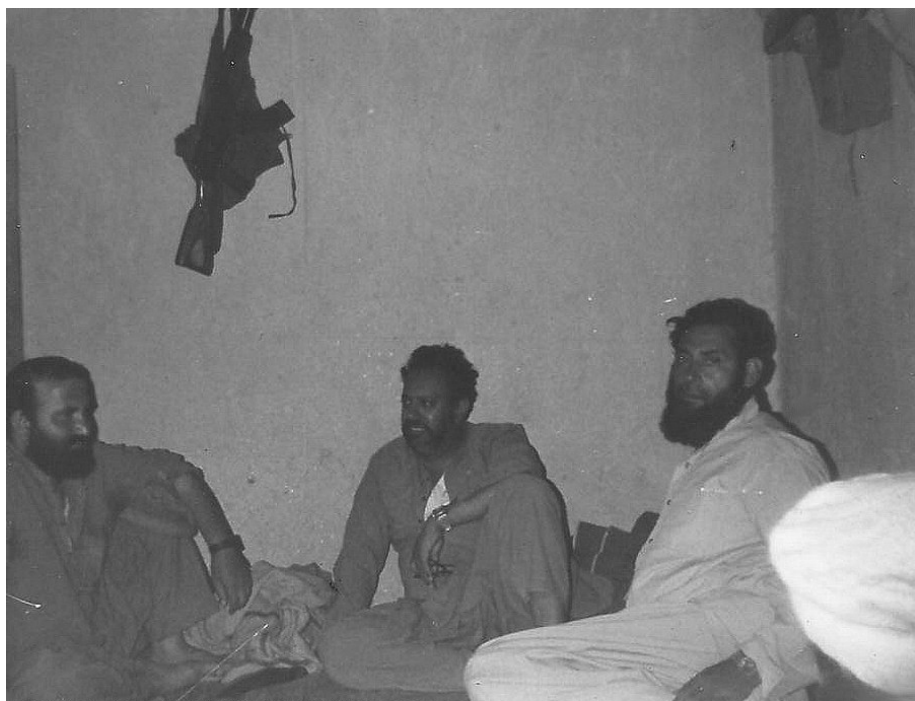
Map of Afghanistan showing some major Cities/Towns, Roads, and Rivers.



The author and team's view of a Soviet-Afghan
air bombing in a valley.



A view of Gunships attacking Afghan Mujaheedin positions in the mountains.



The author with Haji Abdul Haq (left) in Zakhel village.
The house was bombed minutes after the inhabitants' departure.



The village Zakhel—where it all started.



A view of Afghan terrain while climbing up the Shalkay Ghar top.

There were a number of Afghan Mujahideen groups hiding in the mountain. Once when we had reached the top, we could clearly observe the Soviet and Afghan forces along the Kabul-Logar Road, making preparations for their search-and-destroy offensive.

It was then, while climbing the mountain, when Itbar Gul, one of my NCO, suddenly stopped and said, 'Sir, I can see two jeeps moving very fast in the village.' Jeeps? I thought sceptically and stopped to look back and to my horror saw two Mi-24 (Hind D) gunships hovering in the village. Itbar Gul had mistaken the gunships for jeeps, looking down at them from height. The gunships then started pounding the village and particularly blasted the very house where we had been having tea about an hour or so ago. This was my first brush with the gunships and the Soviet air power.



Soon we were at the top and found a small grotto where we took shelter. A number of Soviet jets came and started pounding all the hilltops in the vicinity while a lone surveillance aircraft kept circling over Shalkay Ghar, no doubt guiding the jets and gunships to the targets.

Abdul Haq was a very good conversationalist and could speak good English. The discussion, as happens in such places, turned to Soviet tactics and Mujahideen shortcomings. I found Haq very sound in these matters, as generally all concerned Pukhtoons were. 'If only we had some potent anti aircraft weapon system with us . . .' he had lamented. When asked which weapon he had in mind, he replied instantly, 'Stingers.' I was surprised and impressed by his knowledge. I promised to do whatever I could in this respect, which incidentally was not much.

After staying for more than three weeks in Afghanistan, during which we saw a good deal of Soviet air power and the havoc they played, as also how useless SA-7s (Surface to Air Missiles of Soviet origin) were, we started extricating, which was more like escaping, because by then a strong Soviet and Afghan convoy was out on search-and-destroy mission and was following in our footsteps. It was perhaps on 15 August when we reached a small hamlet and were received there by a simple and poor villager named Badshah Gul, who was the only one staying with his family. He, true to Afghan traditions, brought out everything in his house for us to eat and would not take 'no' for an answer. Knowing full well that the poor fellow did not have enough for his family, which included three or four small children, we were overwhelmed by their large heartedness. I still remember to this day that as we started to move out, his children were watching us with curiosity. I patted his little daughter, about four or five

years old, and handed her some money as the proud father would never accept anything himself, and then we moved ahead.

About 100 yards or so from the village, the track led to a small hill. We started climbing on that track, which was quite steep. We were six persons with two mules which carried our gears and also one odd SA-7. It was then, when suddenly two low-flying Su-25 (Frog foot) jets pulled up from behind the hill. They flew so low that I could clearly see the pilot turning his head and looking directly at us. It was again Itbar Gul who shouted, 'Sir' and was looking at me expectantly for some orders. I thought for a moment that five or six persons with two mules were perhaps not a worthwhile target for jets, but I had underestimated the Soviets. To my horror, I suddenly saw them make a hostile manoeuvre. Being from air defence, I knew what was coming, so I shouted to my men to take cover, and just in time, as both the jets made two passes at us firing rockets and machine guns. Luckily no serious damage was done. Itbar Gul was injured; he had a splinter in his arm, and I had some hit in my leg, but nothing serious. Meanwhile, the mule with SA-7 on its back had bolted as if it knew that the weapon carried on it was of no use. The mule somehow had stopped and was waiting for us about a few hundred yards ahead, on the same track.

There was an eerie silence after the jets had gone. Then suddenly the silence was broken by shrill cries of a women wailing, coming from the village we had just come from. Soon we came to know that the little girl whom I had patted on the head just a while ago was killed in that attack. I can never forget her face. Somehow, we felt guilty for her death, since the aircrafts were actually targeting us.

That day I felt very strongly that if ever Allah Almighty provided us a chance, we would hit this menace very hard.

Finally, we arrived safely back in Pakistan. After the usual debriefings to the intelligence staff, director, and DG, ISI, and a pat from General Zia-ul-Haq, who had invited us to his house for a cup of tea, we got back to our normal routine.

By this time, there was lot of activity in our headquarters, and our staff was raising lot of dust in trying to convince the CIA that we badly needed a potent anti-aircraft (AA) missile. But because of some constraints, political or otherwise, we always ended up without much gain. Privately the officers, at least at mid and lower-level, thought that the Americans actually never wanted to give such a system to the Afghan Mujahideen that could drastically change the battle scenario. They preferred a death

by thousand cuts for the Soviet Union, same way as the American forces had been bled and forced to withdraw from Vietnam. I remember one of the CIA officers telling us, 'We are taking a very sweet revenge from the Russians for Vietnam.'

Finally, after lots of ups and downs, we were informed that we would soon be getting a new AA (anti-aircraft system). That turned out to be Swiss Oerlikon 20mm (millimetres) AA and ground-target-gun type 10 ILa/5TG. It was basically a point defence system, requiring lot of maintenance and was not fit for the rugged terrain of Afghanistan. Theoretically it could engage low-flying aircrafts up to about a maximum of 2000 metres. The Mujahideen already had similar AA machine guns (MGs) like the 12.7mm and 14.5mm, which were as good and were much simpler and cheaper to use and were much robust. We got about ten or so of these (Oerlikon guns), but they proved of no consequence, just as we had envisaged.

Next we heard we were getting the Blowpipe AA Missile system. Being from air defence, I knew that these British Blowpipes were radio-controlled anti-aircraft missiles. These required the firer to continuously keep the target in the aiming sight while controlling the missile track by signals sent through a joystick. This missile system had a history of pathetic performance in the Falkland's War. A number of them were fired by the British troops, but only one or two hits were claimed, all of which were of doubtful nature. By this time, Americans were already training Pakistani instructors on this weapon system. A rest house had been selected in an isolated place somewhere near Sargodha City for the training purpose. Frequently, I was sent to oversee the training and other related matters. Peculiarly strange was the fact that, during discussions, I found the American instructors praising this missile a lot, much against our own perception. Perhaps the CIA had been mandated to sell this to Pakistan. But not a single Pakistani officer was ready to fall for this. Finally, the day arrived when we could know the worth of this system. It was the firing day. A place near the same rest house was selected. The missiles were to be fired on flares. DG, ISI, our director, and operations staff had gone to witness the firing.

The first missile was fired by our best student. The missile followed an erratic path. Instead of going towards the flare, it turned left on its own, and then went straight up flying in a funny pattern till finally it had to be destroyed by a self-destroying system incorporated in the weapon system. The missile had simply refused to accept any command signal sent by the firer. The second missile turned right and refused to take guidance, and

again it had to be destroyed. The third missile also behaved very erratic, which was fired this time by the American instructors themselves. It also refused to respond to the signals, and to our horror, we found two F-16s flying overhead. The firing was immediately stopped by DG, ISI, Gen. Akhtar Abdur Rahman, who left after telling us rather curtly, to check why the missiles were behaving so erratically. The Americans were furious. Colonel Travis, the chief instructor, was just mad and fuming, and he had some nasty things to say for the British. We had noticed that there was some sort of rivalry between British and American soldiers. Americans often made fun of their British counterparts. Actually the Americans also knew that this weapon was useless, which they confided to us much later. They were simply trying to oblige the British at our expense.

After about two months, another firing was scheduled. This time at Nowshera firing ranges. Major Daud was in charge of our firing team. There were American instructors also, though their chief instructor was missing this time. About fifteen missiles were fired. Only three or four could be considered as tactical hits, meaning thereby that it was near enough to score, had the target been a real aircraft. Such firing results are not acceptable in Pakistan air defence. But we were shocked to see Major Daud, much against his own and our expectations, being patted and told that it was good firing by the DG, ISI, and soon we were further surprised to learn that a Blowpipe training school was to be established in Ojhri Camp (a huge ISI complex located in Rawalpindi City, which also housed some training facilities, some offices of its Afghan cell, as well as an ammunition dump). And thus despite all our reservations, the school started functioning, and we began training Mujahideen on this system.

It was after some time when the Americans had become somewhat intimate that they confided that we were stuck with this system because of other considerations as the Americans were trying to return some British favour. They also confided that the reasons the earlier missiles behaved erratic was that the persons in charge of production in Britain were under immense pressure by the British Government to increase its production for some reasons. Thus they were forced to cut short many checks, and much of the quality was compromised. The signals sent via the joystick in the aiming sight and the receiver in the missile itself did not match. And what is more, they had already exported many missiles of that lot to other Middle Eastern and Arab countries. They also, however, told us, as an afterthought, that they (British) were now in the process of recovering and rectifying those missiles.

A number of Mujahideen were trained and were issued with this system. But no hit was recorded anywhere, whereas we nearly lost Captain Qadir, a dashing SSG (Special Services Group) officer who was injured while he was trying to shoot down a Soviet aircraft with a Blowpipe during the battle of Khost Garrison in 1986.

All the above factors had the growing realisation that if the Soviet air is not countered effectively, the results could be disastrous. However, the constant pressure by our staff and some very friendly senators, especially like Charles Wilson (who along with his lady friends was a frequent visitor to Pakistan) did start to have some favourable effect on the decision makers. There were perhaps some other factors also.



The Die Is Cast



Pakistan Army had also been equipped with Stingers by this time. These missiles were deployed around border towns like Parachinar, Chitral, etc. On a fateful day in the early months of 1986, a Soviet Mi-24 Hind flying over Parachinar was engaged, but no hit was achieved. Over a period of time, Pakistan fired eight to ten Stinger missiles with no results (twenty-eight according to some other estimates). This sent a shock wave through American defence establishment which had equipped the NATO and American forces with this missile. Had they been equipped with a useless shoulder-fired missile? They wondered. Pakistan air defence commander, Major General Agha in those days also felt very badly about it. It was rumoured that he had in fact managed to get the Stingers much against the advice of Army School of air defence. The school had thought that it was no different than other heat-seeking shoulder-fired missiles like the SA-7s and would not fare any better. General Agha thought otherwise; he even arranged our men to be trained in Peshawar instead of Malir, where our Air Defence School was located, by US instructors.

So shocked were the Americans and Pakistanis over this Stinger performance that they got a team of experts from the USA to ascertain the reasons for such dismal performance. The team carried out a detailed investigation; they interviewed and checked every firer, visited the exact firing locations, and checked the training standards. And then they came up with a strange conclusion. They put about 20 per cent to 30 per cent blame on the training, some percentage of blame on equipment handling,

some blame on extreme weather, and so on. In short, they put a little bit of blame on everything. Perhaps they could not reach a clear conclusion. However, one thing was clear. The CIA privately confided to us that they thought that it was the training that was mainly to be blamed; probably there was some flaw in the training. We in the ISI thought otherwise. We knew that Pakistan air defence gunners were all very well trained and efficient. The fault was in their employment and not in their training.



In short, all these factors combined together forced the decision to induct the Stingers. However, the CIA had only one condition this time. They wanted Pakistani instructors to be trained in the USA. This was readily agreed by the ISI. Thus the die was cast. For security reasons, this decision was kept secret for some time. We were told we were getting some air defence missiles called Essone (S-1), and we all thought that the training would be held as usual somewhere in Pakistan.

Finally, two officers, two JCOs (junior commissioned officers), and four NCOs were selected by Brigadier Yousaf, our director. Both the officers, Major Daud, and I were gunners. I was from air defence, and Daud was from field artillery. Subedar (JCO rank) Shabbir, Naib/Subedar (JCO) Nazar Khan, and Havaladar (sergeant) Noor Hussain were from infantry. Havaladar Sattar and Naik (corporal) Iqbal Shah were from artillery, and Dafadar—(a rank in armoured corps equivalent to sergeant)—Naimatullah was from armoured corps. All JCOs and NCOs were selected, amongst other things, on the basis of their education. All were at least matriculate, had a good reputation as instructors, and were well disciplined. They did prove equal to the task, and any army would have been proud of these men. We were given only about ten days or so to prepare. The CIA was very keen to know the criteria for selection of these men and would often goad us on this. We could tell them nothing as at that time we knew nothing much about this.

Getting Ready

Thus all eight of us got on with the preparations. It was a hectic time. At that time we had a new officer posted in as officer-in-charge of operations and training, Lt Col. Sultan Amir, a tall, fair fellow with remarkable personality from SSG. He was commonly known as Colonel Imam. A thorough gentleman and a professional soldier totally dedicated to the Afghan cause. I was to work for seven years on the Stinger training,



employment, and deployments with him. It was a real pleasure working along with him.

Being the senior most, I was in charge of the team. We had numerous things to do: getting our NCOs fitted in Western attire was one, situations they might come across and how to respond was another, plus many other things. There were briefings by the director and a CIA officer also. One of their officers was to accompany us from here to the USA and back. Another CIA officer was to stay day and night with us in the USA, which made us feel more like being under ‘open arrest’, as we call it in the army. The CIA officer’s briefing was a short one but very interesting. He mostly touched on the cultural aspects and warned our men what to expect. He later told me that they had been training people from all over the world, and the moment persons from closed restrictive societies (meaning Muslim countries) landed in the West, they straight away went for bars and nightclubs and such sort of things and often ended up making fools of themselves—a fact also confirmed to me by our embassy officials in Washington. He also told us that to walk in public, holding hands like many men do in Pakistan, is considered queer in the USA. I was impressed by their insight into our society and how deeply they were involved. The CIA people in Pakistan in those days seemed quite concerned about Pakistan’s image, and they gave a feeling of really being on our side.

Finally, on 10 April 1986, eight of us, along with Captain Steve from the CIA, left Islamabad via BA 222. It was a long uneventful flight, except that we had a bird hit and arrived late at night in England and found someone had bungled somewhere, and we had no hotel reservations. Captain Steve was perturbed and as usual blamed it on some British goof-up somewhere (we were flying by British Airways). However, Steve managed to find some bed-and-breakfast type of accommodation in the suburbs of London. Finally we reached Washington, USA, on 12 April. Next day by evening we were at *Fort Bliss*, home of the American air defence, located in El-Paso, which was to be our home for the duration of training.

On arriving at *Fort Bliss* after a long and tiring day, after hopping around from one place to another, it finally appeared that all administrative problems had been well taken care of. However, rather surprisingly, it seemed that there was still one little thing left to be sorted out. And that was, where were we to be accommodated? For obvious reasons, we were not to be lodged where normally foreign students are accommodated. First, they thought about putting us in a hotel in the city. This was again discarded as the CIA was scared of some snooping reporters bumping

into us. Captain Steve was in civvies and was posing as an officer from the State Department. He was accompanied by two or three other officers to help him in getting us settled. Finally, after much haggling and discussions, they found the right solution. All of us including the conducting officer were to be lodged in a barrack, which was reserved for nurses. A hurriedly handwritten sign on a two-feet-by-one-foot board was put up on the entrance gate of the barrack, saying, 'No US Personnel Allowed'. Once we entered the barrack, there was some sort of a hastily made partition. We turned left and the nurses would turn right if and when they came for training. JCOs and NCOs were put up in one or two cubicles. The officers had a small room which had an attached bath. This attached bath was a special favour to us officers from Pakistan. This was probably their senior NCO's room.

In US military, they mostly have community bathrooms for their men, so it is quite normal for a number of persons to be using the toilets, washrooms, at the same time. It was not unusual for them to be moving around casually with towels on their shoulders. Talking or gossiping while taking shower or using toilets is common amongst them. Once we heard some commotion, our men were shocked to find the new conducting officer, Mr Gary Erb (who had replaced Steve), in the washroom and were reluctant to use the washroom in his presence. The problem was solved easily by staggering the timings. Our NCOs were also taught how to use the laundry, press uniforms, and such other trifles as the US soldiers normally do. There was a TV also, which worked most of the time. And thus that's how we finally settled down in our new environments. We were more concerned with the task that lay ahead and were eager to start our training.

In the morning, we were taken to the mess hall for breakfast, where we were received by Lieutenant Colonel Takahashi, in charge of allied student's battalion. We had a separate hall reserved only for our messing, and the mess hall again had a sign of 'No US Personnel Allowed'. We were also introduced to our mess secretary, who happened to be an old motherly sort of lady. She developed a lot of liking for our group and really looked after us very well. She was very keen for us to visit her home and be introduced to her pet turtles. She had requested our conducting officer a number of times for this. Obviously, we were not permitted, and CIA staff always made some sort of excuses. However, once near the end of our training period, our conducting officer agreed to allow her to take our group for sightseeing and later on to her house for a cup of tea



The Stinger training team in washington D.C.

L-R: Subedar Shabbir, Dafadar Naimet, Havaladar Noor,
Naik Iqbal, Major Mahmood, Major Daud, Subedar Nazar,
Havaladar Sattar

and introduction to her pet turtles. But, soon, the outing was cancelled. The conducting officer was perhaps instructed from higher authorities to cancel this outing immediately. Seemed like our movements in the USA were being constantly monitored by the CIA. She felt very bad about this and told us that she had never before been stood up by so many men at one time, a fact she complained jokingly on the last day when we went to thank her and say goodbye.

We were briefed by Colonel Takahashi about the rules of *Fort Bliss*, some dos and don'ts, which mainly consisted of things like, no permission to take photographs in the fort, no moving out alone or without permission, and no meeting with other officers who were under training from different countries, especially those from Pakistan. Fort ID cards were issued and other details sorted out.

But despite all these precautions, one thing strange was still going on. We could understand the CIA staff's efforts to make us less obvious, but we all from Pakistan were still in 'khaki' uniform. So a strange group of eight soldiers in 'khaki' uniform, moving around in a civil van with a driver and escort officer, also in civvies, appearing from and vanishing in reservist nurse's barracks, dining in the mess hall where no US personnel were allowed made us rather more obvious and object of curious gazes wherever we went. Luckily they realised this quickly, and soon we were issued American uniforms and from then onwards were able to merge with the crowd, somewhat.

At night, we had a sentry posted in our part of the barracks, rather just outside our rooms, fully equipped and armed with a rifle, a TV, a VCR, and movies. Every day he used to sit glued about two to three feet from the TV, watched the movies throughout the night, and leave early morning.

And thus we got settled for our 'Stinger' training.

The Training

From 14 April 1986, our classes began. We got up early morning, dressed up in khaki uniforms (till then we had not changed into American uniforms), went outside the barracks gate, and found Captain Steve and Gary Erb in quite a perturbed state. The reason? The van that was detailed with our team was missing. Finally the driver along with the vehicle arrived after quite some time. He had simply overslept. The driver was given a sound dressing down and was immediately replaced. Gary felt very bad and was

worried as to what type of image of US military we would carry back to our country. We assured him that these things do happen sometimes and made light of the incident to ease the atmosphere. There were many occasions when Gary had to worry about US Army's image, especially when once our van driver, who was this time from some radar unit, argued with Gary in my presence that sun rose from west. Or the time when the nurses, who had finished their training, created a rumpus, shouting, shrieking, catcalling, and throwing the furniture around, throughout the night, celebrating the end of their training. They made so much noise that we could not sleep although we were at the other end of the barrack. Gary felt very much perturbed by these things and apologised to us for such behaviour, but we were in fact quite amused. So were the Americans, at times amused at our actions. They could not understand as to why we were reluctant to eat ice cream or something while walking on the roads. Or the time when one of our JCOs commented at the number of foreigners in the restaurant hall where we had gone for dinner, without realizing that we were the foreigners there, not they.

Finally, after a hearty breakfast, we moved to the classes, and there again, we were shifted from one classroom to another, till finally a classroom was selected for us. There we were introduced to our Stinger instructors, Sergeant Glatz and Sergeant Evern. They remained with us throughout our course. They were good and competent instructors though they once complained that we asked too many questions, and according to Sergeant Glatz, we asked questions which American soldiers never asked. The NCO rank is the workhorse of American military: in fact, the backbone of the US Army. The American Army felt very strongly about that.

To quote Maj. Gen. Donald R. Infante, commandant of US AD School in those days, 'The key to victory remains initiative at the lowest levels of the battlefield which is especially the case in Air Defence Artillery.' He also said, 'Those of you who believe only generals make history don't understand soldiering. The fact is that it's non-commissioned officers and soldiers who make history.'

Taking this into Pakistan's context, it would only read that it is also the junior officers and men (JCOs, NCOs, and soldiers) who make history. Something we have seen happen during the Afghan War. Something rarely acknowledged by our nation.

It was a no-nonsense type of training. It was very thorough and apt. The training schedule was carefully prepared. Friday was off for us instead of Sunday. The training included operation of Stingers, techniques of fire,

and silent laying practice on RACMATs, (radio-controlled miniature aerial target). These were more or less like training drones we use in Pakistan, engaging targets on MTS (moving target simulator). It is something like the Dome Trainer we use in Pakistan but was more sophisticated and modern. We were taken to *White Sands* firing ranges where we selected an area resembling Afghanistan terrain, and then helicopters would fly in those areas for our outdoor practice. Sometimes, 'silent laying' was practiced on jets flying from a nearby base. It was a busy and tight schedule.

We had also, once been taken to firing ranges to witness their live AA firing. It seemed more like some sort of festival. The soldiers were permitted to invite their families, along with their children, and even their girlfriends to watch the AA firing. At the end of firing, certificates, awards, etc. were given to outstanding soldiers in front of their families and friends, who cheered vehemently. That day we saw them firing Stingers and Chaparral missiles. Later we were briefed by one of the officers on these and some other AA weapon systems. It was an exhilarating experience. Inviting the families and friends to witness firing was one of the ways to create some bondage between the army and civilians. I had heard that long time back Pakistan Army AA firing also used to be something like this.

Almost all lectures were taken by these two instructors. However, off and on we also had civilian instructors from General Dynamics, the company that produced these Stinger missiles. They gave us lectures mostly on the technical aspects of the missile system, including the handling and operations of supportive and training equipment like GPUs (gas pumping units) and THTs (tracker head trainers).

Finally the firing day arrived. This time the atmosphere at the firing range, unlike their own firing day, was very sombre and serious. Our two instructors were not with us this time; they were at the firing ranges, all right, but were not allowed to interact with us till after firing. They watched us from a distance with lot of apprehensions. The firing points were manned by people from General Dynamics who were all civilians. The civil instructor who was in my firing pit told me that he had fired hundreds of Stingers and was nearly deaf, and that's why he heard only when he was shouted at. We were supposed to fire on BATS (Ballistic Aerial Target System). These were small rockets which flew at speeds of 350 kilometres or so and are used for live AA firing. Apart from people from General Dynamics, who were with us at the firing point, this time there were quite a few officers from the

school's instructional staff also. We had never seen or met them earlier, during the entire training period.

The firing result was excellent. We fired eight Stingers on BATS and achieved 100 per cent results: four were direct hits and four were tactical hits. One missile malfunctioned and fell a 100 or so metres from the firing pit and exploded in the front of the firing position. Luckily no one was hurt, and we continued the fire. The firing was filmed from different angles and then later it was sent to headquarters of the CIA and the ISI. That day, their chief training instructor, Lt Col Frank Farkas was also present. At the end of firing, he shook hands with all of us, praised us for the good results, gave a sort of a pep talk, and advised us to look after ourselves and to shoot straight, and he also apologised to us for having to leave early as he had some important schedule at the golf course. He later commented to our conducting officer that 'I wish our boys could shoot as well as these guys do'. The first time we had seen him was when one day he came and sat quietly, watching us training on MTS. Then he called Gary Erb, our conducting officer, and they had some heated discussion on something. When he left, Gary came to me a little upset and said that the chief instructor had recognised some men as trained air defence gunners from Pakistan and had blamed the State Department for playing games and not telling the truth.

I had some convincing to do to Gary that these men were not from air defence and had never been trained by any Americans before, in Pakistan or outside Pakistan. The fact is, we felt that some sort of distrust existed between the Army and the State Department people, a normal bureaucratic rivalry. Armed forces and civil bureaucracy have an inherent distrust of each other. I think probably this exists everywhere. Actually everyone in *Fort Bliss*, apart from those who mattered or were concerned directly with us, seemed to be suspicious of us. Everyone was keen to find out who we were and why we were being treated so differently. Everyone, even our instructors, were told not to ask us any questions other than training matters. At another time, a very enthusiastic duty sergeant, or someone like that, banged into our barracks late at night for a surprise check (purposely I think). He started shouting some commands as they normally do when they carry out surprise checks on their troops. But he found one of their shivering sentry at shun position and some five or six strange-looking people attired in strange dress (salwar, kameez, a loose shirt, and pyjama-type trouser normally worn in the subcontinent) looking confusingly at him, wondering what had happened. The conducting officer who was sleeping in the next room came rushing. There was a bit

of shouting match between them, and they were almost on the verge of exchanging blows when the conducting officer asked him rather sternly if he had noticed the sign at the entrance which said that 'No US Personnel Allowed'. At that the duty sergeant left mumbling something. After that night, we were never bothered again.

At the end of firing and after the chief instructor had left, one of the US officers, whom we had never seen before, approached me and, after congratulating us, requested me to recommend his name to our government for secondment as instructor or something. I could only assure him that I would do my best. During the entire period of our training, only once or twice did some officer come, sat in the rear of the class, and, after watching the class or training for sometime, left quietly. It was exactly the way as some of our officers behave when training is on, and they have to while away the time. That day I thought Pakistan Army and the American Army had many common traits. I also realised that human nature is the same, whether in Pakistan or America or anywhere else.

Finally, at the culmination of our course, we had a small exclusive ceremony where we were awarded Stinger firing pins, badges, and certificates of training, and then we had a small farewell tea party. Colonel Takahashi was the presiding officer; he also saw us off. We thanked our instructors, whom we had found very friendly and nice persons; they were very popular with our group. Sergeant Glatz told me on the last day that he had requested our conducting officer to permit him to invite us to his son's birthday party. Of course, this was not allowed. Nevertheless, it did show us how friendly and simple the average American is. They promised to visit us in Pakistan sometime.

At last we left *Fort Bliss*. We first went to Washington where we stayed for a couple of days and were taken around on sightseeing and other interesting tourist spots. Then we went to New York from where we moved to Saudi Arabia for Umra (a pilgrimage to Mecca performed by Muslims) and finally after about three days' stay in Saudi Arabia, we reached Islamabad on 11 May early morning.

Early next morning, on 12 May 1986, I was called to our director, Brigadier Yousaf's office. There he, along with deputy director, and officer in charge operations and training, Colonel Imam were waiting anxiously for me. They were not interested in any other thing except the missile system and how it was supposed to work. After a thorough and long debriefing, Brigadier Yousaf told me to make preparations to start a training school in Ojhri Camp, right under his nose. By then the Blowpipe School had almost finished. So we started our preparations in right earnest.

The Planning

Mind is the ultimate weapon

Our team immediately got busy. But first we got to understand what type of missile the Stinger was. And what was expected of it.

Stinger is basically a man-portable, shoulder-fired IR (Infrared) homing, heat-seeking missile. It has limited capabilities against flares. It has a speed of about 668 m/s (metre/second), weighs only 34.5 lbs on shoulders, and its effective range is 4.5 kilometres with a maximum range of 5.9 kilometres. It needs no guidance after launch. It can be operated by one man and takes on aircraft in all its aspects, that is incoming, outgoing, and crossers. It is designed to counter high-speed low-level, ground attack aircraft. It is a lethal weapon against helicopters, observation and transport aircrafts. It is produced by General Dynamics of America and was supposed to have a kill ratio of 70 per cent, a fire-and-forget type of missile. The system basically consists of a Stinger missile sealed in a disposable launch tube assembly. This launch tube assembly when mated with the launcher (called grip stock in the military) and then when a BCU (battery coolant unit), is inserted in it, makes it ready for action. Stingers in this configuration are called ‘Ready Round’ in the military.

The next phase in the planning stage was to study as to what type of AA weapons had been used in Afghanistan so far. In what numbers were they used, and how they had fared. What was the level of training and how far were the principles of air defence adhered to.

It was obvious that this time the planning staff had realised the importance and the need to counter air power. Air Defence aspect was now being given due importance and considerations. It was a great shift from our infantry-oriented army thinking. Our planning staff was maturing gradually and had realised the importance of countering the air power.

For this, we had to rely on our past experience and thus had to dig up our old records from somewhere. Once we collected the data, we set it up in a tabulated form. Thus what we got is given in Table 1. This chart at a glance showed us the year-wise induction of different types of AA weapons and how they had fared in Afghanistan. Eventually, it also gave us a rough idea as to the quantum of AA weapons that would be required.

The chart, as given below in Table 1, showed us in tabulated form the number and types of AA weapons that had been inducted year-wise in Afghanistan. This chart also gave us the total number of hits scored every year. Finally from this data we could comfortably deduce the number of AA weapons (all types) required for a kill.

Table #1: Number of Weapons Inducted Year Wise

Year	Type of Weapons					Hits	WEAPONS PER AIRCRAFT
	12.7mm	14.5mm	20mm	SA-7	Blowpipe		
1981	550	92	—	25	—	115	5.8
1982	1635	67	—	30	—	179	9.67
1983	4023	254	—	36	—	99	43.56
1984	4408	333	—	96	—	67	72.19
1985	4504	828	10	210	—	108	51.4
1986 (till June)	3272	1027	7	318	28	68	68.31

Note: This chart shows that on overall average 41.82 number of AA weapons of all types were required to down one aircraft. However, it also showed that during the early years, less numbers of weapons were required to down an aircraft, but as the years progressed and the Soviet pilots became apt at countermeasures, more and more number of weapons were required to shoot down an aircraft.

Next, it was time to study Soviet air power and tactics in the Afghan scenario. With the new awareness amongst our planners about air power and its devastating effects, it had become necessary to reassess the Soviet and Afghan air tactics. It was very important to learn their strength and weaknesses.

The Soviets in Afghanistan, by that time, had a variety of aircrafts in their arsenal. Mostly they had fighters like MiG-21s, MiG-23s, Su-17s,

Su-22s, Su-25s, and Yak 28s. The Su-25 (Frog Foot) was specifically designed as a ground-attack aircraft. They were akin to American A-10 aircrafts. With ten hard points, it could carry a variety of munitions, including laser-guided bombs. These aircrafts were highly manoeuvrable and were, for the first time, used in Afghanistan. Since the Soviet and Afghan forces had no air threat, these fighter aircrafts were basically used for ground support missions only. As far as the helicopters were concerned, the most visible and the most dreaded were the Mi-24 Hind series (A to E series), sometimes called as 'Satan arb' (Devil's Chariot) by the locals. These gunship helicopters were specifically designed for attack missions and extensively used in ground support. In addition, these could carry about ten soldiers in its fuselage also. These were heavily armed and armoured at appropriate places, making them quite immune to AA MG fire. The only vulnerable places they had were probably, the turbine intakes, rotor assembly on the tail, and the oil tank under the fuselage. Indeed, they had become the most-hated and feared helicopters in Afghanistan. Mi-8 Hip, Mi-6, and Mi-17, which were primarily transport and utility helicopters, were also visible. Mi-8 Hip E version was reputed to have had the heaviest fire power amongst gunships in the world till then. They were also sometimes used for aerial mine laying but mostly as troop carriers. Sometimes Mi-4 Hounds were also seen; these were mostly used for dispensing flares, heat decoys, and scouting and also probably as forward air controllers. Transport aircrafts like An-22, An-12, Il-76, etc. were also extensively used. An-12 and An-22 were often used for reconnaissance and surveillance missions apart from normal air transport duties.

It had been realised much earlier that the Soviets per force had to depend much on their air power. Missiles like SA-7 As and SA-7 Bs, which were being supplied to the Afghan Mujahideen, were basically of Soviet origin. Hence they knew well how to counter them. The flares used by Soviet planes were very effective in distracting these missiles, a fact which I had observed myself on several occasions.

Some of the common tactics as used by the Soviet/DRA air forces in Afghanistan are enumerated as below:

- Before bombing an area, a number of aircrafts or helicopters would fly over the target area and saturate it with flares and then suddenly the attacking aircrafts would swoop down and press home their attacks.

- One or two aircraft would circle high out of range of AA weapons and divert the attention of the Mujahideen drawing their fire, while two or more aircraft would come suddenly from different directions and attack before one could become aware of them.
- Often they would fly low between nullahs and gullies and then suddenly pop up to strafe or rocket unwary travellers in the mountains.
- Their attacking aircraft would normally start their attack profile, from between 7,000 to 8,000 metres away from the target. Flying at very low altitudes, when within firing range, they would climb up to, say, 100 metres or so and then begin their attack run.
- In the early stages of the war when the Mujahideen were not very competent in deployment techniques and used to deploy guns in isolation, the helicopters would hover directly over the gun and start descending in the dead zone of the gun, forcing the gunners to flee.
- Helicopters were also used as escorts for big transport jets like IL-76s when they came for landing in Kabul. Two or three MI-24s would continuously fire flares till the aircraft had landed safely or attained safe height.
- The aircrafts would normally fly in pairs. Never singly, especially when attacking.
- At times they used to attack in large formations. A number of helicopters or jets would continue circling in the target area swooping, hunting, and firing again and again while two to four helicopters kept firing flares above. It was much like the American 'wagon wheel' tactics of Vietnam era when they used to attack in circular pattern. Each aircraft, after attack, would break away sharply, taking evasive turns, or go terrain hugging, to preposition itself for another attack run.
- Contrary to common belief, Soviet/DRA forces always tried to rescue their downed comrades and would make desperate efforts to save them.
- The helicopters were also used in conventional manners, like landing troops to cut off escape routes, replenishments of garrisons and isolated posts, evacuation of casualties, etc.
- Often when on convoy protection missions, some helicopters would hover high above the convoy, watching for guerrilla activities while, at the same time, troops would be landed on important high ground along the way. Much like the British technique of road

picketing, which was practised in the frontier in the old days; only this time helicopters were used.

- Sometimes to provide protection to their ground troops, they used helicopters and jets to clear the approach route by attacking up to twenty to thirty kilometres ahead of their marching columns.
- They used helicopters often and very effectively for ambushes. The ‘Spetsnaz’, the Soviet’s highly trained Special Forces, were very good in using them in ambush roles. A small group of ‘Spetsnaz’ dressed in Afghan attire, with powerful radio sets, would be dropped or placed on a hilltop at some vantage point from where they would observe main roads, tracks, etc. frequented by the Mujahideen. The moment they noticed a worthwhile target, they would radio the base. Two to four Mi-24s or jets along with same number of Mi-8s would take off immediately. Coming low, they would attack the main convoy while Mi-8s would land troops on both ends of the convoy. The job would be finished in matter of minutes. It was by using these tactics that the Soviets managed to ambush a small party of Mujahideen near Maltani Nullah in Kandhar on 4 January 1987 and managed to capture their first Stingers. That day some Mujahideen, belonging to Mullah Malang (the Butcher) of Khalis Party, were transporting two grip stocks and three missiles on motorcycles. They were surprised by four helicopters and two jets. One missile fired in a hurry hit the ground, being too close to it. All four Mujahideen were killed, perhaps one escaped to tell the story, and the Soviets took away two grip stocks and two Stinger missiles.
- Most of the times while carrying out operations in a certain area, a single high-flying An-12 or such like aircraft was observed. The aircraft presumably kept a watchful eye over the area and warned its aircrafts whenever any missiles were fired upon them and also guided the attacking aircrafts to Mujahideen positions.



Concept of Employment

After much deliberations and discussions, it seemed rather obvious that whenever the Soviet or Afghan pilots would come for attack, they would be extremely vigilant and alert and thus less vulnerable. Their IR jammers would be working optimally, and they would be dispensing flares extensively. They would be making fast entries and exits, thus making it

difficult to be engaged effectively. Something which the Pakistan Army AD (air defence) gunners had experienced earlier.

Hence it was decided to use Stingers mostly in an AA ambush role, depending heavily on the element of surprise and, at times, even luring them in with decoys, when necessary.

Thus, it was decided to employ Stingers in the following fashion:

- Near and around isolated and far-flung Afghan or Soviet garrisons' outposts which were frequently replenished by air.
- Areas near and around air bases, where lot of air activity normally took place. At such bases the aircrafts had to fly low while taking off or landing. Thus making them vulnerable to Stinger attacks.
- For AA ambushes on flight paths and routes frequently used by aircrafts.
- In mountainous valleys, gullies, and ravines where the aircrafts were forced to fly through a certain approach.
- For the protection of Mujahideen lines of communications, strong points, supplies routes, etc. in a conventional manner.
- To keep AA teams constantly on the move. It was decided not to have fixed firing positions and thus have the enemy always guessing about their locations.

It was also discussed whether to induct them in large numbers at once, thus getting as many hits as possible before the enemy could develop some effective counters to it or to induct them slowly, thus saving missiles for a prolonged battle and also exercising better control on them. We knew that it was only a matter of time before the Soviets got hold of one of these missiles and developed some effective countermeasures. An in-between solution was finally decided upon. It was decided to initially induct them at a deliberate pace and watch the Stinger system's effectiveness and the enemy response to it before taking a final decision. But nevertheless, it was decided to use it in a bold fashion deep inside Afghanistan, much against the American thinking of deploying them close to the border. Thus initially Stingers were inducted in piecemeal, but when the Soviets captured two Stingers on 4 January 1987, from then onwards these missiles were inducted at a rapid pace to inflict as much damage as possible before the countermeasures got effective.

With this concept, our intelligence staff was tasked to locate isolated garrisons' posts which were frequently replenished by air. They were also



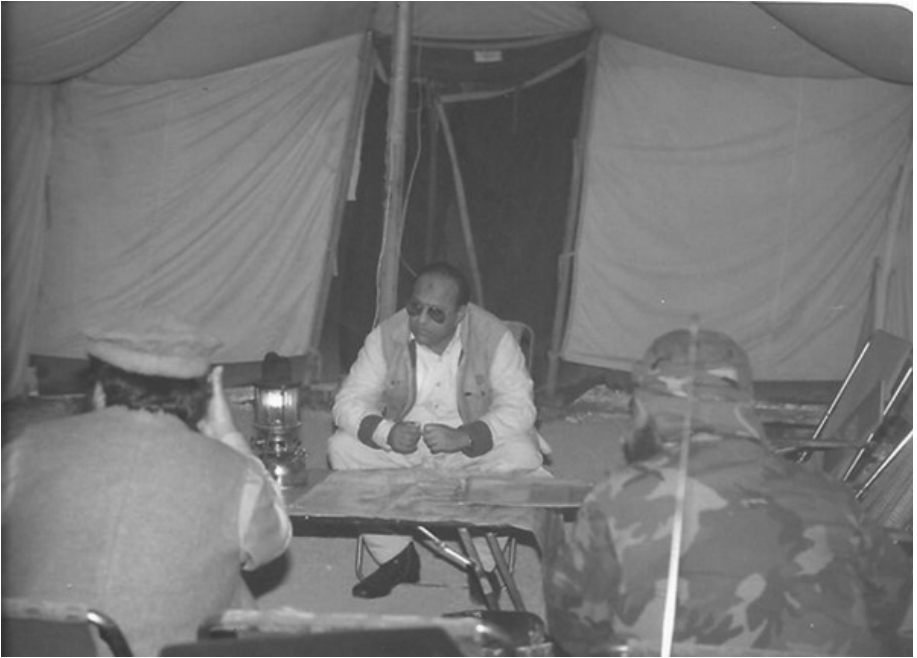
tasked to monitor and mark the flight patterns in different areas including the forced approaches. All isolated posts and forts in Afghanistan were located and marked and a close watch kept on them.

Meanwhile, we started enthusiastically preparing for the training classes. Frankly at that stage, we still had some apprehensions. Stingers had not been battle-tested yet; thus we had kept our fingers crossed.

In August 1986, a small refresher course of three to four days was conducted by American instructors in Pakistan in the now-famous Ojhri Camp. This time a special force's officer of the CIA, Major Victor, who was stationed in Pakistan was also detailed to oversee the first batch that was to be trained. He was the go between, rather more like a liaison officer between our operations staff and the CIA office in Islamabad. We got along pretty well till he was posted out by the CIA. By August 1986, our Stinger school was fully operational. Everything was in place. We converted a large hall into a substitute for MTS or Dome Trainer. A large screen was got painted with an area resembling Afghan terrain from local film signboard painters. We told them that we needed this for a stage drama we were doing. For IR sources (any source that emitted heat also gave out IR), some small bulbs were placed at different points hidden behind the screen, the on/off controls of the bulbs being with the instructors. Silent lying could be done on aircrafts flying from Chaklala air base. Some sort of AA training gadget was prepared with the help of pulleys and ropes and toy aircrafts. Two GPUs with a number of Argon gas cylinders were flown in from the USA and placed in the school. We carried out the pressure-proof tests of these GPUs in the school ourselves. Thus by the end of August 1986, we were fully ready for the first training batch.

Selection and Training

To induct these missiles, a broad-based policy was developed by the DG, ISI, after consultation with the director and the operations staff. In that policy, it would be decided as to which province, area, and party, depending on the situation, needed the missiles the most. After having decided that, Brigadier Yousaf, in consultation with Colonel Imam and his staff, would call prominent and reliable commanders of that area for interviews through party reps. Once the commanders had been



The Author in deep discussion with Afghan Mujahideen
about operational plans.



Stinger training class in progress at a camp

selected, then it was Training and Operational staff's job to do the rest. The nominated commanders along with their men were collected from a secret rendezvous (RV) at night, at the RV, they were quickly shifted into the ISI transport. Usually the training instructors were deputed to collect them and bring them to the Stinger School. They were housed, fed, and trained right in the school for the duration of their course. The training days were not fixed; it depended upon the student's competence. Once the training started, it would continue till the students were ready. The operation and employment of Stingers would be discussed in detail with the commanders. Suitable firing positions were selected from the map and discussed. Once ready, the commanders were given an RV and time near the zero line, where they were finally handed over the weapons by their instructors. The instructors would go along with them right up to the border and ensure that they crossed over. It was a very wise decision as our higher-ups were also worried that if the weapons stayed in Pakistan, there was chance of its pilferage or misuse or maybe, coming back and getting in the wrong hands. Once across the borders, our responsibilities were over.

It had also been decided that initially each Mujahid commander was to be issued at least three grip stocks and nine missiles. The commanders were promised resupply of the missiles only on receipt of the fired tubes. In case of a miss or a technical failure, the Stinger firer was supposed to come back for re-evaluation and further training, if necessary. In this way, a steady check was kept over the whereabouts of the missiles.

A lot has been said about the selection of these commanders, but the fact is that this was purely done on merit, keeping in view various professional aspects. The selection of Mujahideen for Stinger training had no bearing whatsoever as to which party they belonged to. It was purely cold logic and not favouritism that was kept in mind, and the subsequent results in combat did prove its far reaching effects amply. As far as priority of engagement was concerned, we had decided that the first priority was to engage transport aircrafts, next was to engage helicopters, and last of all, jet aircrafts. Of course, any aircraft attacking was to be engaged instantly.

In August 1986, we received our first batch of students. They consisted of two commanders, both from Hizb-Islami (Gulbadin) group, along with thirteen Mujahideen. The commanders, who were selected by Brigadier Yousaf, were Engineer Ghaffar from Ningarhar, a border province, and Darvesh from Kabul. Both commanders were competent; Ghaffar could

speak Russian fluently, along with a little bit of English and Urdu, besides Pashto. This being the first course was particularly important. No time schedule was set. It was decided that they would be trained till we felt they were ready. Actually I knew that while training, a stage comes when one feels very confident and is itching for action that one wants to test himself as to how he would fare. We were watching for those signs in our students. Our aim was to drill and grill them so much so that it becomes their second nature.

To instil a healthy competition, a bet was made between the two commanders as to who would get the first kill. Major Victor also had his bet with his friends in the CIA Islamabad headquarters. He correctly bet that the first one to get the kill would be Ghaffar, a bet he won eventually. Finally, we felt they were ready. I went to launch Ghaffar, while other instructors went to launch Darvesh. Both were launched from different points. You can understand my fears when on the day Ghaffar was to be launched, he was found missing though his group had reached the RV on time, an attitude which I learned eventually is normal in unconventional warfare. Nevertheless, he arrived after some delay. During that time the whole group had to stay in hiding in the mountains. When he arrived, we heaved a sigh of relief. He was handed over the weapons. We went right up to the zero line with this group, and there, after a short prayer, we hugged the Mujahideen and said goodbye to them as we saw them cross over and vanish in the dim sunset light. We came back to Islamabad and the waiting game began.

The Bang

The game's afoot!—Sherlock Holmes

It was on 25 September 1986 when Ghaffar, along with his team, waited patiently amongst bushes and rocks on a small hillock situated some distance NE (north-east) of Jalalabad airfield. He had placed his three firing teams in a triangular pattern at some distance from each other as they had been taught. They had been waiting there in ambush for quite some time. In the afternoon at around 1600 hours local time, their patience was rewarded when they saw a number of helicopters (all Mi-24) approaching the runway. The helicopters were unaware as to what fate awaited them. They felt very secure with the airfield in sight and about to land. They were not firing any flares or taking any precautionary measures as it was considered a routine matter. It was a very excitable time when the first firing team got the lock-on sound of the seeker. The firer pulled the trigger, the missile left the tube with a loud bang, and then to everyone's horror, the missile hit the ground about 300 yards in front of the firer. It was a dud missile. Very few people know that the first Stinger missile fired in Afghanistan went dud. It was here that the training came into action; the teams had been well instructed in misfire, dud-fire drills. While the first team, undeterred, got busy in preparing the second missile for fire, which takes only a few seconds, the second team got their missile locked-on and fired; this time the missile course was true and accurate and hit the first helicopter. In a matter of few seconds two other helicopters were downed, and the remaining helicopters made helter-skelter crash-landings.

The bang was heard throughout the world. Military flights between Jalalabad and Kabul were suspended for a considerable period of time. The action had been witnessed by the local population. This was the first use

of Stingers against Soviet aircrafts in a war zone. The Stinger had made its debut and Engineer Ghaffar had won the bet.

From thence onwards, there was no looking back. Stingers created an impressive track record. An interesting thing noticed had been that, ever since its induction, the overall kill ratio of the aircrafts in Afghanistan for other AA weapons had also increased dramatically.

Darvesh, meanwhile, had not fared well. He was positioned in the flight path of the aircrafts coming for landing in Kabul, but his impatience got better of him, and he, out of frustration, fired at an outgoing jet aircraft, obviously missing it, and then fired another one or two at fleeting targets. He had not adhered to the teachings. He had to be recalled for debriefing and re-evaluation, and subsequently, he redeemed himself and was finally credited with five hits, though he claimed many more. Ghaffar was credited with nine helicopters, though he claimed fourteen to fifteen hits. He was later awarded by DG, ISI, for his excellent performance.

In 1986, thirty-six grip stocks (launchers) and 154 Stinger missiles were inducted in Afghanistan. Out of these, thirty-seven Stingers were fired, shooting down twenty-six aircrafts, thereby achieving a hit percentage of above 70 per cent—an amazing result. The rate of shooting down of aircraft had shot up to almost one per day. The periodical *Newsweek* of 10 August 1987 claimed it was up to 1.2 to 1.5 a day, while Lt Gen. Leonard Perroots, ex-director DIA (Defence Intelligence Agency of the USA), claimed that for the first 100 days, the Soviets and Afghan air force lost at least one aircraft every day.

The Enemy's Response

By now the reports suggested that Soviets were now reluctant to press home their attacks, and they resorted to steep dive or high altitude bombings. A sure sign of the effectiveness of air defence measures. Many Mujahideen had reported that the only time they were aware of an air raid was when the bombs started exploding around them. The aircrafts flew so high that they were barely visible; consequently, they were highly inaccurate.

Nevertheless, we had expected some sort of reaction from the Soviet or DRA air force. When they resumed their flights, after quite some time, we waited keenly to see their response. A number of countermeasures were adopted by them. As expected, there were two types of countermeasures:

tactical and technical countermeasures. Tactical countermeasures are those which can be performed by the air crew themselves, while technical countermeasures depended on technology.

Tactically, the following countermeasures were adopted by the Soviet/Afghan pilots:

- The aircrafts started flying NOE (Nape of Earth) i.e. at very low altitudes, say about fifty feet AGL (above ground level) or at very high altitudes (out of range of Stingers). NOE puts lot of constraints and fatigue on the pilot and the machine and brings it well within the range of small arms fire. On the other hand, to remain out of Stinger's range, the aircrafts started flying very high, that is, generally around about 4,500 metres AGL or even higher, say around 7,000 metres AGL. This was considered a safe altitude to fly by Soviet and Afghan pilots in Stinger environments.
- The pilots started making violent right or left manoeuvres whenever they entered the combat zone or they suspected Stingers approaching them. This, however, was only possible when the pilot was aware and saw the missiles coming at him. These type of violent manoeuvres were only possible by Jets. Helicopters and transport aircrafts were too cumbersome for such tactics.
- Enemy resorted to steep dive-bombing, making a sharp twisting and turning exit, which was not very effective.
- Pilots were briefed that if they saw a missile coming, they should turn in its direction. That way, the hottest part (tail of jet) would be away from the heat-seeking missile, and thus, there was some chance of missing the aircraft. Till then the Soviets still believed the Stinger to be a tail chaser only.
- Soviets resorted to replenishing their outposts at night instead of day. In fact, the Soviets, at least once, succeeded in combining night and low-level flight when they managed to insert a battalion-sized air assault force in the rear of the Mujahideen forces during the relief of Khost garrison in December-January, 1987-88.
- The large transport aircrafts while climbing or landing at air bases started flying in a tight cork-screw fashion, while some helicopters kept firing the flares as they flew around the runway in a bid to distract any missile that may be fired. This cork-screw fashion flight was practiced even by civilian aircrafts, which resulted in a lot of discomfort to the passengers. From 27 January 1988 onwards

Soviet flare dispensing Mi-24 E/F began providing escorts for all Soviet military and civil fixed-wing aircrafts during their arrival and departure at Kabul. These were deployed for IL-76, AN-26, AN-30s, AN 12s, TU 154, and YAK 40s. Normally 4x Mi-24 E/F continued to fly circular flight paths around Kabul airport line astern about 500 to 700 feet AGL. They continued dispensing flares till the aircraft had landed or attained safe altitude.

On the technical side, in all measures, Soviets chose improvements in flares and flare dispensers as the primary counter measure for Stingers. Basically, the Soviets' countermeasure was only extension of their systems which they had developed against the less effective SA-7 As. By the middle of 1980s, the Soviet helicopters had featured a set of shields on the fuselage side that acted as baffles around the turbo shaft engine exhaust to reduce the infrared signatures, making it more difficult to be acquired and locked on.

1. In January 1988, a Soviet TU-154 and later IL-76 were observed with new flare dispensers mounted inside both of its main landing gear fairings. The flares burned for approximately six to seven seconds. These new flare dispensers were used continuously throughout the aircraft's climb or decent that is from a height of about 4,000 feet to down about 800 feet AGL. It was about time for these new flares to arrive. Earlier, we had estimated that it would take from about six months to a year or so for the Soviets to come up with some effective countermeasures fitted on all aircrafts operating in Afghanistan. However, even these did not prove very effective, as events later proved.
2. The Soviets also had as an active infrared countermeasure viz. the Hot Brick system. The idea was to have a source of infrared radiation on the helicopter, which would jam the seeker head of an infrared missile. This system was mounted on dorsal spine of the helicopter aft of the engines; it was hoped that it would generate enough infrared radiation and confuse the missile, thus denying the missile seeker head to effectively lock on the radiations from the engine.
3. Soviets tried using different types of flares and IR jammers. Jammers are rather expensive and not fitted on all aircrafts, and the Soviet jammers of those days did not work continuously for long

periods. They were however partially successful on helicopters, but transport aircrafts which could carry heavier equipment were quite successful in diverting these heat-seeking missiles. No IL-76 hit was reported till then. In 1988, three continuous attempts at Kandahar airfield on these aircrafts were unsuccessful, while a MiG-21 flying the same pattern was shot down. The transport aircrafts used a larger flare, burning at 6000°C while the flares used by helicopters and fighter bombers burned at 3000°C.

4. It was reported in 1987 that the Mi-24 Hinds of the 377th Helicopter Regiment based at Kabul International airport were fitted with a missile warning system, designated LIP. Apparently it was some sort of radar system which showed the bearing and range of an incoming missile so that evasive actions could be taken. This also did not prove very effective. Between October 1986 to July 1987, the 377th had lost around eight helicopters (at least six to Stingers), including one of their commanding officer.

Apart from the above-mentioned tactical and technical countermeasures, they also had some operational counters. They decided to target the SAM (surface-to-air missile) sites. For that they had to depend on credible intelligence. After location of such sites, it was hoped to destroy them by artillery or air strikes or by their special operations. The Soviets even announced any pilot, whether Afghan or Soviet, a reward of 150,000 Afghanis (about \$3,000 in those days) who could locate Stinger or Blowpipe sites. They often used transport aircrafts or helicopters flying out of range of SAMs for reconnaissance. I remember once the Mujahideen had captured and occupied a famous Afghan ammunition depot located on the roadside near Sumerkhel, a small garrison outpost located near Jalalabad; we knew that it would be subjected to intensive bombardment and had placed some 57mm AA Guns along with 37mm AA Guns which had been shifted from Iraq after the Gulf War along with the Stingers. Surprisingly, the Afghans only carried out high-altitude bombings, which were very inaccurate, and the depot remained safe though once or twice it had close calls. Such was the fear of Stingers. They never ventured low. We carried normal small Sony transistor radios whenever we ventured in the combat zone. These radios could intercept the Afghan air force transmissions. It was very exhilarating to hear their flight commanders warning other aircrafts not to venture low as Stingers were reported in the area.

Our Counter

We had detailed discussions on all these aspects. Of course, some reaction was expected. We had discussed this with our American counterparts also and were prepared for it. As the enemy started flying higher, they became very inaccurate, and if they flew very low, they became very vulnerable to small-arms fire. In fact, with the induction of the Stingers the number of aircraft hits by other weapons had also increased considerably.

Now our emphasis shifted to creating roving AA teams and night operations.

- Roving AA groups were created having a mix of all types of AA weapons. Generally these groups would have a mixture of different types of AA weapons, which were being used in Afghanistan at that time. It consisted of 3x to 4x 12.7mm/14.5 mm AA MGs, an odd SA-7 A/B, if possible a Blowpipe team with at least 2x RPG-7s and at least two or, preferably, three Stinger teams. They were highly mobile and were trained to observe enemy habits, determine their flight paths, and often succeeded in ambushing them. Mobility and surprise was their strength.
- At that time, no night firing sights had been developed and hence it had no night firing capabilities. Thus some improvisation had to be done. For night firing, we, at Ojhri camp, had modified special brackets and mounted PAS-7 Mod I thermal imagers on them for night-time use. These sights, at least six of them, were given to selected commanders. Commander Mannan (a subcommander of Haqqani group), who had earlier managed to hit an aircraft at night, relying completely on the sound of seeker was one such commander. Probably this was the first night engagement by Stinger anywhere in the world. He was later given a night sight and was credited with eight aircraft hits at night. CIA officials met and interviewed him and were so impressed that they decided to take him to the USA to share his experiences with American Special Forces, but unfortunately, he was killed in May 1989 while clearing a mine field in Paktiya Province.
- As we were aware that the Soviets mainly depended on flares, we had trained Mujahideen on anti-flare tactics, known as off-set

firing method. It was noted that if the rate of dropping of flares was less than one per every three seconds, then they did not have much effect on the Stingers. Mujahideen had also refined the off-set technique of fire. In this technique, the missile was aimed well ahead of the aircraft's flight path. As soon as the tone was heard, the cage/uncage switch was pressed and the moment lock-on sound was heard, the missile was fired. No doubt it was a bit difficult, and we taught this to only experienced commanders. Engineer Ghaffar shot down two helicopters which were dropping flares, using this technique. It was also observed that depending solely on the tone of the seeker the aircraft could be tracked and shot down. Stinger operators, through experience, knew how much SE (super elevation) to give. Some students were even made to practise with eyes blindfolded.

- We continued to always include some Blowpipes if we could, especially in roving AA ambush teams for one simple reason only. They had great psychological impact. When the pilots know that there is no technical countermeasure against the missile that is coming at them, it has a tremendous demoralizing effect. So Blowpipes did have some positive part in the Afghan air battle though only psychological. It also proved the advantages of the principle of mix in AA defence.

The Balance Tilts

No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn

Despite all Soviet countermeasures, the results achieved by this weapon system had been most satisfying. Afghanistan has been, in fact, the proving ground for this weapon. We can think of anything this weapon should have done, and it has been done. It has been transported on foot, in jeeps, pickups, on mules, horses, camels, and even on motorbikes. It has been fired from rooftops in built-up areas, mountain tops, desert areas, in gullies, in fact from everywhere. Though its most effective use was in ambush role, it has also been successfully used in conventional role, such as convoy protection and defence of bases and strong points.

15 February 1989 was a landmark day in the history of Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. It was on this day that the last Soviet soldier finally left Afghanistan for good. In a symbolic manner, Lt Gen. Boris Gromov became the last Soviet soldier to walk back from Afghanistan from across the Friendship Bridge, spanning the *Amu Darya* River. Lieutenant General Boris was the last commander of the 40th Army in Afghanistan. He was later awarded Hero of the Soviet Union medal with gold star, the highest Soviet military medal. Militarily speaking, the single most factor that gave a decided edge to the Mujahideen on the battlefield had been the induction of Stingers and their deft handling by the Afghan guerrillas. It had changed the whole battle scenario.

Thus for the ease of understanding the performance of the Stingers more clearly, one can roughly divide the Stinger saga into two significant periods. The first period is its performance from the day it was first inducted in September 1986 to 15 February 1989. The day the Soviets left Afghanistan. The second period comprises its total performance during the entire period. The first period was in fact the most significant and

vibrant period of the Stinger saga. During this time, maximum number of students had been trained (a total of 1164 had been trained during this time). Maximum number of Stingers had been inducted and, as a result, maximum number of aircrafts downed during this time. This was indeed the period when the balance decidedly tilted in favour of the Mujahideen.

Table 2 shows, in a tabulated form, the induction rate of the Stingers and shooting down of the aircrafts till 15 February 1989, the day the Soviets left Afghanistan.

Table #2: Hit record from 1986 till 15th Feb 1989

YEAR	INDUCTED		FIRED	HITS	HIT PERCENTAGE	NO. OF MISSILES PER AIRCRAFT
	GRIPSTOCKS	MISSILES				
1986	36	154	37	26	70.27%	5.92
1987	227	1111	201	164	81.59%	6.77
1988	45	323	99	79	79.68%	4.08
1989 (till Feb)	—	—	5	5	100%	1
Total	308	1588	342	274	77.18	5.59

At this time the hit percentage was about 77 per cent. As the war progressed, the percentage dropped somewhat. However, it remained generally around 70 per cent. The normal training course was of two weeks. Though, once we even ran a course of four days only and ended up shooting down a transport aircraft. This happened during the battle of Khost. Of the 274 aircrafts downed, 101 were helicopters, 92 were transport aircrafts of almost all types (except IL-76, which was finally shot down in Kabul in 1990), and 81 were jets. Thus of all the aircrafts downed roughly 37 per cent were helicopters, 34 per cent were transport and only 29 per cent were jets. In fact, to my surprise, whenever there was a miss, I was hauled up and had to explain the reasons behind the miss. People had started thinking that under right conditions it was impossible to miss. We were surprised to hear from some Afghan defectors that they believed that if they saw a Stinger coming towards them, then the only way to save them was by saying their prayers.

Given below are some of the interesting case histories during this period which had been documented.

- Engineer Mahmood of Hizb-i-Islami (Khalis) shot down a helicopter that was flying lower than his position. That means, he was pointing the missile lower than the standard 10 degrees elevation which is mandatory before firing. He was sitting on a hilltop and the helicopter was flying in a ravine, below his position. This happened in October 1988 in Ghani Khel area in Ningarhar Province. The time was 1600 hours; it was flying about 200 feet below the firer and was about 2,000 metres away. The pilot was captured alive.
- Commander Mannan of Haqqani group became probably the first man in history to shoot an aircraft at night with Stinger. At that time, no proper night sight had been developed.
- About three to four aircrafts had been shot down while the helicopters were dispensing flares.
- Until the Soviet withdrawal, no Stinger operator was killed in aircraft versus Stinger duel, though at times Soviet and DRA pilots did try to engage missile firing sites. Sometimes under certain weather conditions, whenever a missile was fired, it left a strong contrail, which would normally take some time to dissipate. Thus it was easy for jets and even helicopters to align themselves on the contrail which led them to the point from where it was fired. We had lost a couple of SA-7 firers previously that way.
- Two weeks duration was considered sufficient time for training. Generally thirty to forty students were trained in each group. The largest course consisted of about 114 students. In 1987, when the battle of Khost was in full swing, we had to train on emergency basis a small group of Mujahideen for only four days and dispatch them. When they were dismounting from their vehicle they saw an AN-12 passing overhead, which they shot down.
- On the first day of arrival of students, they were nominally examined for medical fitness, especially for their sight and hearing. Unfit students were generally returned; however, at times, seeing the keenness and enthusiasm of the students, we were forced to relax this rule. They did prove their usefulness. One Afghan Mujahid named Ghulam Nabi, again from Haqqani (Khalis) group, on 27 July 1988, shot down an outgoing helicopter in Sate Kandow

area in Paktiya Province. He had only one eye; his right eye had been damaged earlier in action.

- Most of the aircrafts shot down were either crossers or oblique crossers (almost 90 per cent). About 6 per cent to 7 per cent of the helicopters downed were either receders or outgoing, while only 3 to 4 per cent of the aircrafts downed were incoming or approaching head-on. No hits for outgoing or escaping jet fighters were recorded.
- Maximum range at which most of the aircrafts were engaged remained between 2,000 to 4,000 metres of slant range.
- Most of the aircrafts were shot down while flying below 3,000 metres.
- Stinger was found to be a very robust system. Out of more than 300 grip stocks, only nine were found faulty, which were returned back to the USA. Out of about 342 missiles which were fired, only four misfired and two duds were reported.

Thus the first phase of the Stinger Air Warfare in Afghanistan ended on 15 February 1989. But that did not mean the battle had ended. There were still about four years of fight left. The situation in Afghanistan did not improve dramatically. The Soviets had left, but now their surrogates, the DRA were fighting. The Soviets had left Afghanistan more or less like the Americans had left Vietnam. The American supply of Stingers had dwindled and later totally halted, but whatever supply we had was being continuously supplied to the Mujahideen.

The Final Count and Assessment

I remained with the Stinger programme till 1993, and I was rather unceremoniously asked to leave along with many others when the ISI was apparently cut down to size. And this time, it was by its own people. The Stinger saga in Afghanistan, which spread over a period of almost seven years (from 1986 to 1993), had been through many ups and downs and highs and lows. The complete and a clear picture as to how they had fared and how and what results they had achieved finally emerged as follows.

During this period, we trained a total of 1401 Mujahidin. The last batch of sixty-nine Students was trained in 1991. After that, no more organised classes were conducted, and the school as such remained closed, though

it kept operating to provide field support and guidance to the Mujahideen. We had some very prominent commanders like Jalal-ud-Din Haqqani of Khalis party or General Rahim Wardak of Effendi (who later became the defence minister of Afghanistan) as our Stinger students; they were trained in the Ojhri Camp. The Stinger school had become quite famous by then in the intelligence circles. Initially, the ISI was very secretive about this school, especially during Brigadier Yousaf's time. No one was permitted to visit this school, and Pakistan Army Air Defence perhaps did not even know that it existed right in Rawalpindi, just about couple of miles away from the Air Defence Headquarters. They even refused to acknowledge that someone from army had done Stinger training course from the USA. Perhaps Senator Humphrey was the only one allowed to visit and see the training. Later on, as time progressed, the rules were relaxed. We had many visitors at the school from the USA as well as from Pakistan. Some prominent visitors amongst them were late Prime Ministers Mohammad Khan Junejo and Mohterma Benazir Bhutto. We were rather surprised and impressed by the interest shown by both these late prime ministers; they asked a lot of pertinent questions and spent quite sometime in the school. From the American side, there were many senators, congressmen, even men from DIA (Defence Intelligence Agency of America). Most we did not know, and every visiting American was simply referred to as some congressman.

Apart from American and Pakistanis, no one was allowed to visit this place. Thus we were surprised to see a photograph in an American Magazine *Soldiers of Fortune* (Mar 1989) of a small trophy room which we had created in the Stinger School. The CIA apologised for this breach. It seemed that some well-connected journalist had somehow managed to sneak in with the dignitaries. It was assessed that after the induction of Stingers, the overall hit record for other type of AA weapons had also improved a lot. Probably as the aircrafts started to fly low to avoid Stingers, they came well within the effective range of small-arms fire. Stingers had amounted to only 23.72 per cent of total aircraft losses after its induction.

Table 3 shows us the final count of party-wise Mujahideen that were trained between 1986 and 1991.



The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto,
visits the Stinger school



General Rahim Wardak and Jalaluddin Haqqani—two Stinger students

Table 3: Afghan Mujahids as trained year-wise and party-wise

Year	GB	K	R	S	N	E	M	Moh/R	Total
1986	40	51	18	30	12	—	—	—	151
1987	207	111	180	129	41	65	38	—	771
1988	57	46	31	17	42	29	15	—	237
1989	18	32	18	24	3	13	6	10	124
1990	14	20	10	5	—	—	—	—	49
1991	10	7	36	6	10	—	—	—	69
Total	346	267	293	211	108	107	59	10	1401

Key

	Party name	Party leader
GB	Hizb-i-Islami	Gulbuddin Hekmetyar
K	Hizb-i-Islami	Younis Khalis
R	Jamiat-i-Islami	Burhanuddin Rabbani
S	Ithad-i-Islami	Abdur-Rabur Rasul Sayyaf
N	Harkat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami	Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi
E	Mahaz-e-Milli	Pir Sayed Gailini
M	Jabha-i-Nijat-i-Milli	Sibghatullah Mujaddidi
Moh/R	Harkat Islami	Sheikh Mohsini (Roving group)

Pakistan had received a total of 487 grip stocks (launchers) and 2288 Stinger missiles from America in all. Out of these, 122 grip stocks and 281 Stingers were destroyed in the famous Ojhri Camp blast on 10 April 1988. That left us with only 365 grip stocks and 2007 missiles. Out of these, 336 grip stocks and 1969 missiles were issued to the Mujahideen, and the rest were returned back to the USA.

The table below gives in a tabulated form as to how and at what pace these missiles were inducted in Afghanistan on year to year basis.

Table # 4: Year wise induction of Stinger missiles

YEAR	INDUCTED IN AFGHANISTAN	
	GRIPSTOCKS	MISSILES
1986	36	154
1987	227	1111
1988	45	323
1989	15	187
1990	2	108
1991	11	86
Total	336	1969

In the next chart—(Table 5) as given in the next page—we can at a glance see the overall party-wise performance of Stingers in a tabulated form. This table illustrates all the important data about Stingers and how they fared in Afghanistan. It probably is the most comprehensive chart showing us all that we need to know or could be of interest to us.

Table # 5: OVER ALL PERFORMANCE DATA

Party	Issued	Captured/ Sold	Returned	Retrieved	Fired	Hits	Hit %	Expanded %	Balance with parties
GB	83/412	—	2/-	1/2	117	72	61.53	28.64	80/293
R	70/376	-/2	1/-	-/-	94	73	77.65	20.96	69/280
K	66/419	10/34	3/-	2/4	190	113	59.47	54.41	51/191
S	54/422	-/1	1/5	2/4	178	137	76.96	44.54	51/234
N	24/114	-/1	-/-	-/-	36	24	66.66	27.19	24/77
M	14/77	-	1/-	-/1	20	12	60.00	27.27	13/56
E	25/149	-	1/-	1/2	66	33	50.00	45.63	23/81
Total	336/1969	10/38	9/5*	6/13	701	464	66.19	35.52	311/1212

*All the 9 Gripstocks were sent back to USA while the 5 missiles being dangerous were destroyed by the ISI in Pakistan. The retrieved 6 Gripstocks and 13 Stingers were also sent back to USA.

It would be quite clear that the hit ratio from 1986 to 1989 remained around 70 per cent to 80 per cent but later dropped down to 66 per cent. The simple reason was that after their initial drubbing, the Afghan and Soviet aircrafts stayed well above and out of the Stinger's effective range and altitude, and many a missiles were fired in frustration at out-of-range targets. This caused lot of wastage and the overall hit ratio thus dropped to 66 per cent. By the end of 1991, approximately 311 grip stocks and 1212 Stinger missiles were still somewhere roving in Afghanistan. (To be fair, the figure of 1212 missiles is rather on the plus side. It would be reasonable to conclude that some Stingers would have been lost during infighting, accidents, and other causes and perhaps not reported due to tribal prestige. About 1000 missiles would be a reasonable assessment). These missiles would have been a potential source of purchase and black marketing. It was just available for any terrorist group, a nightmare for the ISI and CIA.

The Stinger's Stinging Reputation

As was clear, most activities regarding the Stinger took place in 1987. In fact, 1987 to 1989 were very crucial years. The Stinger earned a fearsome reputation during this period. It would be interesting here to note some of the comments made by some analysts, magazines, guerrilla fighters, politicians, etc. about the performance of Stingers.

What turned this whole thing around was the provision of Stingers. It's a pity and scandalous that we didn't do this earlier in the war.
(US Senator Gordon Humphrey R-New Hampshire)

Stingers have really frightened them. They depended on their air capability, but that capability has now tremendously decreased. This has raised our morale and allowed us to take the initiative. Stinger has had a major tactical and strategic significance in our struggle.

(Rahim Wardak (resistance leader 'E'),
later Defence Minister, Afghanistan)

Stingers have effectively changed the equation. They have allowed the resistance to set up real sanctuaries.

(Oliver Roy French Scholar, 1987)

Only a handful of jets fly into the valley everyday at very high altitude to drop a few bombs before leaving the area as soon possible, apparently afraid of the Mujahidin's sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons. Helicopters have become a rare sight.

(Floris Van Stratten, Dutch journalist, Kunar, 6 July 1987)

A devastating weapon marked 'made in USA'

(Izvestia, July 1987)

Stingers created additional difficulties for Afghan Army and Soviet troops. This led to additional casualties among Afghan and Soviet troops and the air force.

*(Soviet deputy Foreign Ministry spokesman Boris Pyadyshev,
16 July 1987)*

I spent four days with the Mujahideen last week, and the Russians are taking a terrible pasting on the ground and all I saw of the Soviet air force were fighter bombers at extremely high altitudes, 20,000 feet, and they would not come down although they popped flares.

(Charlie Wilson, D-Texas.)

'It was the Stinger that caused the Soviets to lose control of the skies over Afghanistan, which apparently was the final seal on the Soviet decision to seek to end the war by non military means.'

(Lt Gen. Leonard Perroots of DIA, USA)

Jet flights have been reduced by 50 per cent this year.

Jallaluddin Haqani (resistance leader 'K'), Paktia, 1987

My father said the only good thing to come out of America were weapons-like Stinger missiles.

(Omar bin Laden, son of Osama bin Laden, in an interview in Doha published by The Sun (The Nation Friday, 16 July 2010)).

They used to be kings of Afghanistan, everyone saluted them. But after Stingers, they took to flying very high and the ground troops then referred to them as 'Cosmonauts'.

(Alexander Prokhanov; Russian Journalist)

All these assessments and observations clearly indicated that with the advent of this weapon system, sky was no longer safe for Soviets to strike from. They could still carry out strikes from the air but at a much greater risk than they could ever imagine earlier. No doubt, had the Stinger been introduced earlier, the war would not have lingered on for so long.

The Crucial Years

As I mentioned earlier, 1987 to 1989 were very crucial years. Many eventful incidents happened during this time. General Akhtar Abdur Rehman remained as head of the ISI and the main architect of the Afghan War. He had a fearsome reputation. Those of us at the lower and middle level joked that he ate subalterns and captains for breakfast. He rarely smiled, remained mostly aloof and cold, was a hard taskmaster, but frankly, we never saw him lose his temper, especially with junior officers. He was always cool and calculating. He understood the Afghan's and a soldier's psyche very well, and his decisions mostly proved reliable. In the Afghan cause, he certainly had a mission. He, along with Brigadier Yousaf, another very cool headed and composed person, and Colonel Imam, as in charge operations and training made an excellent team to work with. General Akhtar remained as head of the ISI till March 1987. It was in fact during his time that the ISI became a very potent organisation and gained an awesome reputation. We knew of a report sent by the CIA (Islamabad office) to their headquarters stating that 'Pakistan had gained enough experience, expertise, and capability to destabilise any country in the region'. No wonder the ISI, later on, was envied and hated, at the same time by all the anti-Pakistan forces.

It was again in 1987, when successful use of Stingers by Mujahideen was making so many headlines everywhere in the world that Pakistan Air Defence Command became sceptical and refuted such claims. However, later on, when they realised their mistake, they started blaming the Americans of providing them an outdated or older version of the Stingers. I was ordered to proceed to Air Defence Command headquarters located in Rawalpindi with two Stinger missiles belonging to Mujahideen. There I met a brigadier from Pakistan air defence who had Pakistani Stingers with him, waiting in his office. We compared the missiles I had taken with the ones from the army, and we could not find any difference except that the ones given to the Mujahideen were of later manufacture, while the

Pakistani missiles were indeed older. We had some brief discussion about their employment and tactics, shook hands, and then I reported back to my headquarters with the missiles.

It was again this year that one of Khalis's commander who was issued four grip stocks and sixteen Stinger missiles, while going through Helmand Province, found Helmand River in high spate, so they decided to make a detour through Iran, something which was very explicitly told to them not to do. They were not to go into Iranian territory at any cost. While moving through Iranian territory, they were all captured by Pasadarans (Iranian Border Scouts), and that was the last of these Stinger missiles we ever saw. The Mujahideen group was later released. The Iranians, however, never returned any of those captured grip stocks or Stinger missiles. We had our doubts that it was an accident. The CIA also doubted it. We did manage to get that commander back and interrogated him extensively. Even the CIA came with their special interrogation team, complete with 'lie detectors'. They put that commander through the lie detector tests conducted in Holiday Inn (now converted into Marriot hotel) in Islamabad. It was not conclusive. In any case, they did not share their results with us, and the matter was set aside. Later, I learned that even high-level diplomatic efforts from Pakistan bore no results with the Iranians. This was the second incident of loss of Stingers. Earlier we had lost two grip stocks and two Stinger missiles belonging to Mullah Malang to the Soviets, as related previously.

In March 1987, Lt Gen. Akhtar Abdur Rehman was posted out. He was to take over as chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC). He was replaced by Lt Gen. Hameed Gul. In August of the same year, we also came to know that Brigadier Yousaf was also leaving the Pakistan Army. Apparently, he had resigned, as he was not promoted. We, at our level, were sorry to see such a fine soldier go but, at the same time, wondered why he had decided to resign. After all, was promotion so important? Especially when we had a war going on, and the Soviets were sitting on our doorsteps. We always thought that the Afghan cause was a very noble and first cause and above all these petty things like promotions. We were all convinced that we were fighting Pakistan's war of survival. We were living through eventful history. Thus frankly, we were quite disappointed by his decision. Later on, during his dining out, he divulged, that the day he joined the army, he had decided to leave at whatever rank he was superseded and that he was simply keeping his vow. However, he also told us that he may eventually comeback, even as a civilian, to fight alongside his Afghan brethren for their noble cause.

Never a Dull Moment

Adversity is the first path to truth

After Lt Gen. Hameed Gul had taken over, there was never a dull moment for sure. Brigadier Afzal Janjua, SJ (Sitara-i-Jurat), had taken over from Brigadier Yousaf. General Gul, like General Akhtar Abdur Rehman, was also totally dedicated to the Afghan cause, though he had more proactive and open approach. He was very popular amongst his officers and had their total confidence. He also had a remarkable memory. It was also felt that Pakistan's traditional adversaries considered him a real threat to them while his own men respected and liked him a lot. He also had a very compassionate and caring nature. I remember that when Ojhri Camp blew up, one of our officers Maj. Saleem Inayat was critically injured. He had received severe burns on his face and hands. The Pakistani government, in consultation with the Americans, decided to evacuate the critical injured persons to the USA for better medical treatment. But then, we came across a new dimension of American psyche. They simply refused to evacuate Maj. Saleem Inayat. Why? Because in their opinion, Saleem Inayat had a very slim chance of survival, and thus, it would create a bad image of the USA if he somehow did not make it. We were surprised and stunned at this attitude of theirs. It seemed that life of any human being other than an American was less important to them than their own image. It was then when General Hameed really put his foot down and strongly insisted that either all would go, or there was no need to send anybody. General Gul's insistence paid off, and the Americans soon realised their folly and finally agreed to take Maj. Saleem Inayat also to the USA for treatment. He survived and is now fit and living happily in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

Brigadier Afzal Janjua was a tried and tested commander. Unlike Brigadier Yousaf, who was rather a quiet and aloof type, Brigadier Janjua like most of the SSG officers had a very open and large-hearted personality. He was very caring for his juniors, a real commander, who never bragged about his exploits. He was loved by men under his command, and they would do almost anything on his orders. He along with Colonel Imam and with the blessings of new DG, ISI, made the new team. They shared all the risks and dangers and hardships along with their men. Many of the youngsters could not match the dedication and enthusiasm they had for the Afghan cause. Many junior officers considered it to be an honour and good luck to serve under such men for such a noble cause. I remember once, Brigadier Janjua, Colonel Imam, and Major Aleem got stuck up for the night, somewhere in the mountains in Kurrum Agency. The locals managed one cot or bed for the brigadier to sleep on; those poor people had only one bed in their house, which they had readily offered. So far it was nothing out of ordinary. But when the time to sleep came, to Aleem's surprise, he was ordered to sleep on the bed while the two senior officers prepared to sleep on the ground. All of Aleem's protests were overruled. Brigadier Janjua simply said that he was the eldest and the senior most, so it was his prerogative to sleep where he felt like. I had never heard of such camaraderie in any other army. At another time, one of our JCOs, while travelling from a training camp, met with an accident on the roadside. He was seriously injured and was evacuated to CMH Rawalpindi by the locals. By the time I got the news at our office, some time had lapsed. However, when we reached the hospital, we were surprised to find Brigadier Janjua already there. He had been in the hospital for the last couple of hours. On hearing the news, he had immediately rushed to CMH himself as he well knew that it would be sometime before we arrived at the hospital. The JCO was overwhelmed to see his senior officers right beside him, and it seems that it contributed greatly towards his recovery. This attitude and concern of the officers towards their men greatly enhanced their morale and gave Brigadier Janjua and Colonel Imam a father-figure image.

The Afghan Mujahideen also reciprocated well, and we made many (though not all) good friends amongst the Afghans. When people are herding together in a cave, while the enemy is bombing the hell outside and searching you out, and when one breaks stale and hard bread in remote mountain hideouts, then one develops a very strong camaraderie. However, we were unaware of what fate held in store for us.

Ojhri Camp Blast

It was on 10 April 1988, a sunny and pleasant day. At about 0930 hrs, I had gone to Maj. Salim Inayat's office which was located just near to our offices in the Ojhri Camp. I found him frantically cranking on the field telephone. He looked worried as he was not getting any response from the ammunition dump. No answer from the ammunition dump meant that something was seriously wrong. He hurriedly told me that a bang had been heard from the direction of the ammunition sheds, when suddenly Major Butt came running to the office, saying that there had been a blast in the ammunition shed. Immediately, all officers present in the office, including Brigadier Janjua and Colonel Imam rushed towards the ammunition dump. The ammunition dump was hardly 200 metres away from our office. We saw vehicles rushing out of the dump frantically. Some of those were loaded with ammunition. On reaching the out gate, the drivers of these vehicles were horrified to find the gates closed. The moment the guards at the gate learned something was wrong, they had closed all the gates as per the SOPs (standard operating procedures). The drivers, seeing this, abandoned their vehicles right on the road side in the camp and bolted on foot. It was complete chaos. Ammunition-loaded vehicles were stranded at different places on the road and all bottled up inside the camp. Through all that milieu, Major Rafaqat (a training officer) did manage to take out about eight to ten trucks, which were fully loaded with ammunition outside the camp to Bara Kahu (an ISI training facility located about eight to ten kilometres away from Ojhri Camp). Meanwhile, on reaching the dump, we were greeted with a horrible sight. The ammunition sheds which were stacked up to the top were on fire and so were the wooden ammunition boxes lying all around. Nobody was in the dump. Apparently, no one was trying to put out the fire. It seemed that those present in the dump had got their priorities wrong and, instead of first controlling the fire, got busy in giving first-aid to and evacuation of the injured persons: a sure sign of inexperience and lack of training. Thus, crucial time was lost. It was empty, all casualties had been evacuated, and at the same time, we all realised that we were now only seconds away from the main blast that was coming. Colonel Imam sensed the danger quickly. I remember him saying, 'It is too late. Nothing can be done now.'

We had barely shouted to evacuate the area when the main blast took place. We were thrown in a small depression, and then all hell broke loose.

All types of ammunition, all ten thousand tons of it stacked there, were flying in the air. Stingers were flying in circles, thousands of rockets, A-tk (anti-tank) mines RR (recoilless rifle) ammunition, and millions of rounds of small arm had all gone berserk—it was a madhouse. Lieutenant Colonel Bangesh of Signals, who was with us, was injured in his head and was bleeding. I took off my waistcoat and bandaged his head with it as best as I could. Rockets of all types, mortar bombs, bullets, in fact, every type of ammunition was flying all around us, whizzing past us. It was couple of hours before myself, Lieutenant Colonel Bangesh, Captain Qadir, and an MODC (Ministry of Defence Constabulary) NCO managed to crawl to safety somehow, after cutting through some perimeter barbed wires, and reached the main road. Luckily Subedar Zahoor (Retd), our ever efficient administration JCO, who was coming from somewhere in the jeep, spotted us, and true to his efficiency, immediately evacuated us to Military Hospital. The hospital was on full alert and whether injured or not, one could not escape them. I remember that when I told them that I was not injured and was OK and only had come with others, but the medical staff just would not listen to me and tried to humour me, as if I was in shock. They did not seem to believe me. They winked at each other, and one nursing staff rushed towards me with an injection. I still don't know how I escaped. My only thought was to rush to my office. I ran to the hospital's parking area, where Subedar (Retd) Zahoor was dutifully waiting for me. Somehow I reached my office. It was in shambles, but the main structure had stood firmly. Luckily there were some buildings between our office and the dump which had provided us some protection.

The training ground and the lawns of the office were littered with all types of ammunition but mostly of 107mm Rockets. Our office buildings were safe, though some 107mm rockets had penetrated our offices as well, and one rocket had even smashed through Brigadier Janjua's office and had shattered his chair and table. I was the first one to enter our building. By this time, a number of fire brigade trucks were in the camp. They were doing their best, which was only to direct water at the fire, and when the ammunition started exploding, they took shelter, only to come back again when the explosions had abated a bit. To my surprise, I found my runner and person in charge of our tea bar, Sultan, in a corner of our office under some sort of cover. He was the only one who had not left his post. Captain Qadir was still at the hospital. He had told me that his car keys were in the office desk drawer. I found the key and then drove his car (Suzuki) from the parking area to near the main office, parked it

in a safe place under some cover, and then dumped all the documents, especially relating to Stingers and training, etc. in the car to salvage them, if need be. And then I waited in the office; meanwhile, the ammunition kept exploding all around.

The first person to enter the office was Brigadier Janjua. When I saw his face, I realised for the first time the loneliness and burden of command. He was tired but remained composed. The first question he asked me was about the whereabouts of Colonel Imam and then, one by one, about all other officers. Till then nobody knew the whereabouts of others. I called Sultan, our runner, and asked him if he could get us some tea. Even at such a time, he somehow not only managed it but found a packet of biscuits as well, and what an invigorating cup of tea it was! After some time, we were delighted to see Colonel Imam walk in, haggard, dirty but still strong and fit, and then slowly and steadily other people started pouring in. Even General Hameed Gul, along with one or two of his staff officers, had rushed to the camp while it was still exploding. He again visited Ojhri Camp in the evening and gave a small pep talk to those who were present there. He told us that nothing is going to change and that training and other activities would continue as usual. He walked through the rubble, assessed the situation, and ordered Captain Arshad Rafiq, one of our officers who was injured and his face was bloodied, to go home and rest. Arshad had to go because of the general's orders, but very reluctantly. This was not the time to leave one's comrades. Some of our officers who were on leave or weekend, on hearing the news, immediately reported to our office on their own. One such officer was Maj. Saeed Niazi. On hearing the news, he took hold of his old Vespa scooter and pattered in the office; this was certainly not the time to remain on leave. Major Daud who had come on long weekend also rushed to the office. Both of them remained with us, helping us in searching for survivors and the injured. Major Niazi was also instrumental in finding the body of Major Ijaz (our training officer and colleague, who was lost in the blast). At that time, we also had about fifteen Afghan Mujahideen undergoing training, in the Ojhri camp. No one knew where they were. The building they were in was completely razed to ground. Colonel Imam and Major Daud, both went in the late afternoon to the main ammunition dump area, searching for survivors and the injured. All the time rockets and bombs were exploding all around them. However, before nightfall, most were accounted for. Somehow most of the Mujahideen had also managed to reach back. Meanwhile, we recovered the dead bodies of two Afghan Mujahids who had died in the

blast. Quickly and quietly they, along with all other surviving Mujahideen, were taken back to Peshawar the same night by Major Shoaib, to be handed over to their party offices.

The body count was not yet complete. From our operations and training section, only Major Ijaz remained unaccounted for. He was also my friend and neighbour. We used to come to the office together. He was a very lively, handsome, and vibrant officer who was the life of our office. By nightfall, we were becoming frantic as his whereabouts were not known. That night, Colonel Imam ordered me, along with Captain Qadir, to go and physically check every hospital in Islamabad, even their mortuaries. What a night it was, seeing so many dead bodies, but he was not to be found anywhere! It was very painful to go home alone that night. I knew that Major Ijaz's wife and children would be waiting anxiously for some news, and I had to make a long detour to go home to avoid meeting them. It is very difficult to face the family of your colleague and friend in such situations. Next day, that is on 11 April, we were all present at the blast site early morning at 0600 hours. Another search party was organised, and this time three more injured Mujahid were recovered; they were also evacuated to their party office in Peshawar. One of our training NCO, Naik Ghulam Sarwar, who was an instructor with the Mujahideen, was also recovered alive from under the debris. He was badly shaken. He had remained buried under the debris for about twenty hours. Once Sarwar had recovered, he told me that when he was pinned under the debris, after calling Allah for help, he used to call the names of his officers at the top of his voice. He felt sure that his officers, if they heard his voice, would never leave him alone and would come back searching for him no matter how long it took. Such was the comradeship that prevailed. This day another two or three dead bodies of MODC personnel and some civilians who used to work in the camp were also recovered. On 12 April the search continued, but Major Ijaz Ali Shah was still not traceable, and the worst was now feared. The family of Major Ijaz was living between hope and despair every day. Indeed, they were passing through hell. That day, ASPT (Army School of Physical Training) at Kakul and Dog Breeding Centre at Rawalpindi were requested to send their search and rescue dogs for help. Kakul is a small town about two to three hours' drive from Islamabad. Colonel Akram of ASPT arrived promptly with his rescue dogs and immediately got busy. They soon located another dead body of a Mujahid which was also dispatched to Peshawar. Every day, before sunrise, Colonel Akram used to be with us with his dogs and remained with us till sunset when he would return back to Kakul. He

continued doing this, till his services were no more required. His dedication was indeed exceptional.

By 13 April, the army had taken over the camp and then did what they normally do under such circumstance, which is to completely seal off the area. That day, from our point of view, was wasted. On 14 April, Corps Commander visited the area. Immediately Colonel Azhar Ali Shah (deputy director) and Lieutenant Colonel Sajjad, a Training and Operations officer went to see him. They requested the corps commander to allow us to continue our search. They explained to him the situation as best as they could—our emotional attachment and why we could not leave our friend and had to find him. The corps commander had his concerns, and rightly so. There were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of unexploded ammunition lying in a sensitive state on the ground. The surface was still very hot, and off and on, a rocket or bomb kept exploding, and as a commander, he was not ready to risk more lives. He wanted the area to be cleared and safe first, but nevertheless, he reluctantly agreed to our pleadings and allowed a small search party comprising of one officer and five soldiers only at a time and no more. Meanwhile, Colonel Akram was again requested for his services. He was present at the site with his dogs by 0600 hours and immediately got busy. He recovered couple of more dead bodies which were buried deep under the debris, but still Major Ijaz was not traceable.

I was standing in Colonel Imam's office and discussing this matter when suddenly he said, 'Just a minute, let me see.' He then rang up someone in Mangla garrison, talked to him for some time, and then asked me if Major Ijaz had two children. We were surprised and confirmed it. Then he asked me if he was wearing black chappals (open sandal shoes)? We confirmed it again. He listened to the other person for a while. Finally, he put down the phone and gave us the exact location of the building he wanted us to search. Our search party was already near that building under Major Niazi. Colonel Akram, with his canine team, was also directed to that place. After sometime, imagine our surprise when Niazi told us on walkie-talkie that they had found a dead body deep under the rubble. We were sure that it was Major Ijaz's body. It was then when Colonel Imam explained to us something about spiritualism and how another officer in Mangla garrison known to him had this ability of Kashaf (the ability to see things beyond). He said that person had talked with Major Ijaz's spirit directly and had told him the exact location of his body. But to our surprise, when the dead body was pulled out, it turned out to be of the last missing Afghan Mujahid. By then, it was noon; the ground was so hot that one could not touch it with

bare hands and we felt disappointed and our morale dampened. However, upon learning this, Colonel Imam immediately rang up that same officer again. This time, he informed Colonel Imam that Ijaz had told him that his body was exactly where the search party had found the body of the Mujahid, but it was difficult to see his body as the search party was not looking from the correct angle; he further added that Ijaz had also told him to tell the search party to hurry up and locate his body quickly as his family was under tremendous torment.

So this time again, we made a renewed effort. Lieutenant Colonel Sajjad also went there to help Major Niazi. This time the search party took all tools and the items that they could lay their hands on, for time was running short. We had night goggles, gas masks, torches, thermal imagers, NVDs (night vision devices), etc. It was very stuffy, hot, suffocating, and pitch-dark under the rubble. Finally, this time again, Colonel Akram made the first attempt; he went crawling under the debris with one of his dogs, named Dippy. He came back after sometime and told us that Dippy had found something and another person should now go and confirm it. This time, Niazi went in. He found Dippy sitting beside a small opening. Niazi then crawled near the opening, and then he saw a small hole in the wall. When he peered through the hole, he saw a pair of black chappals in the beam of his torch light. He was sure that it was our Major Ijaz. So after digging frantically, at times with bare hands, the search party managed a large-enough opening to get Major Ijaz's body out. His body was charred but still recognisable. The ID card which was found lying near his body had burned from all sides except the photo part showing his face, confirming that it was indeed Major Ijaz. It was a very emotional day for all of us at Ojhri Camp. So finally, we had recovered his body. Deputy Director Col Azhar Ali Shah and myself were given the unpleasant task of breaking the sad news to Major Ijaz's family. All of us, Brigadier Janjua, Colonel Imam, Lieutenant Colonel Sajjad, and others went with the body to Peshawar, where he was buried in the military graveyard with full military honours at about 2200 hours the same night. We were relieved to find him but, at the same time, very sad also.

The Stinger School and the training equipment had escaped major damage, though more than 200 Stinger missiles were lost in the blast.

General Akhtar Abdur Rehman also visited Ojhri Camp sometime on 12 or 13 April. He went around and met his old officers and had a bit of talk with them. He was of the opinion that it was probably the work of sabotage since all the ammunition that we had was proven very stable,

and there had never been any report of this nature in the last six or seven years. It was obvious that if an accident and faulty ammunition were the cause of this blast, then those who had established this camp in civil area could be blamed and held responsible. Our logistics people had objected to locating this dump near civil area a number of times, but their objections were always sternly overruled by General Akhtar; his priorities were indeed different. However, if the blast was found to have been due to sabotage and poor security, then the blame would easily shift on those elements which were providing security. So a sort of tussle started, with one side thinking it was due to sabotage, while the other thought it was an accident.

At the time the accident happened, some vehicles were being loaded with VAP-80 rockets. These rockets were of sensitive nature and were normally stacked separately. They had different SOPs (standing operating procedures) for storage. Reportedly, these were armed before being shipped to Pakistan; indeed, a very strange thing, if true. They were probably being sent for trials and, in turn, were being sent to war zone, more likely to get rid of them, and empty the dump of them as quickly as possible. These VAP-80 rockets were shipped to us from Egypt. Unfortunately, Egyptian and Turkish weapons and ammunition were not much trusted by the ISI. Reportedly, a box containing VAP-80 rocket fell from some height when they were being loaded in the vehicles for onward shipment. When the wooden box hit the hard cemented ground, it exploded, in turn, putting many other wooden boxes all around on fire. Later on to check its stability, we kicked it, threw it from heights, dragged it, and did everything, but it remained stable. It could well be a simple accident, though one thing strange was noticed. When we sifted through the manual containing handling and storage instructions, we found two pages dealing with storage and handling torn and missing. Was some important information withheld, or it was just a chance? After all, we had our own experts in handling and storage, and they did not depend on these Egyptian manuals entirely. However, it certainly seemed like an accident though the results were a saboteur's dream.

General Zia also visited Ojhri Camp. He spent quite some time in the area, discussing different possibilities with some officers. However, when informed that the initial investigations showed it to be an accident, many tended to disagree. For some reasons, General Zia was also inclined to think of it as an act of sabotage.

Major Victor, the CIA officer, also visited Ojhri Camp the very next day, and he seemed really glad to see all of us safe. He stayed for quite

some time in the camp and enquired about the welfare of all the officers acquainted with him. Probably he had come to assess overall things as they stood at that time.

Although it was a major accident, it never affected the operation and training sections. Training camps continued functioning as usual.

Meanwhile, in the following days, a special team from the USA and France visited Ojhri Camp to help us in clearing the area. Their advice was to first evacuate the twin cities, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, before they could start the cleaning procedures, and this could have taken up to six months. General Javed Nasir, our ex-engineer-in-chief who later took over as DG, ISI, got the area cleared in about fifteen days without necessitating any evacuation.

Crash of Pak-One

Next, it was the air crash of president Zia-ul-Haq's C-130 in which a number of generals died, including Gen. Akhtar Abdur Rehman. Gen. Hameed Gul escaped that crash though the American ambassador had tried his level best to ensure that Gen. Hameed Gul should also accompany President Zia in his C-130. But Providence had other plans for him, and he did not go and thus survived the fatal crash. There were lot of speculations at that time about the crash, and one was that it was probably shot down with a missile and, of course, that had to be a Stinger. However, it was very quickly and clearly established by the Pakistan Air Force investigative team, that it was an act of sabotage inside the aircraft and not a missile hit which had caused the crash. The moment I heard about the crash, I clearly recalled the time when sometimes back I was waiting for Gen. Akhtar Abdur Rehman in VIP lounge at Chaklala air base. I was to accompany him to one of our training camps. There were two CIA officers, also present in the VIP lounge, who were also to accompany us. Strangely these two CIA officers were very keenly watching a C-130 that was being readied for President Zia (who was going somewhere else) much oblivious to the surroundings. One of them suddenly asked me if I knew which aircraft would be selected for the president. Generally two aircrafts were readied for Pak-One flight, and at the last moment, one of the two was selected by the security staff (a normal security precaution). The interest and focus of those two CIA people was indeed very uncanny and strange. At that time, however, it did not seem important, and the matter was soon forgotten. Though, through

hindsight one can think that the CIA people were taking undue interest in the security procedures of the President's travels. Most of the people in army and ISI were convinced, in those days, of the CIA and the Mossad's (Israeli intelligence service) and somewhat RAW's (Indian intelligence service) hand in this crash and probably are still convinced of this.

General Zia's funeral rites were performed in a very sombre atmosphere. He was buried under the shadow of Faisal Mosque in Islamabad. That day, after he was buried and different dignitaries had paid their respects, Congressman Charles Wilson told Gen. Hameed Gul thus: 'I have lost my father this day.' Wilson always thought of Zia as his surrogate father, and Zia considered Wilson as his own trusted adviser. Wilson was the main person who had lobbied in USA and Pakistan for the Stingers. In 1986, at a dinner with President Zia, when Zia seemed a bit reluctant to introduce Stingers, due to possible Soviet reaction, it was Wilson who had suggested Zia that he 'should consider Stingers as an important benefit beyond the weapons battlefield value. It could become a symbol of special relationship between USA and Pakistan.' (*Charlie Wilson's War* by George Crile)

After General Zia's death, Benazir Bhutto's government took over. In 1988, she visited the ISI headquarters and the Stinger School at Ojhri Camp. She stayed in the school for about half an hour or so and seemed very interested in the weapon system. We were rather surprised by her interest and the many pertinent questions she had asked. It seemed to us, that if she had not other pressing engagements, she would have liked to spend some more time in the school.

On to Jalalabad

It was in March 1989 that the preparations for the battle of Jalalabad began in earnest. Selected ISI officers/advisers took a full-fledged part in it. Officers deputed for different tasks used to go early before sunrise in the area and remain there till sunset. We were not permitted as yet to stay overnight unless circumstances forced otherwise. We had a lot of work to do: reconnaissance, placement of weapons, coordination of different aspects, assessing the Mujahideen preparedness and strength, etc.

I was responsible for the overall coordination of air defence assets in that sector. We had managed to get a few 37mm LAA (light anti-aircraft) and 57mm MAA (medium anti-aircraft) air-defence guns from somewhere (not Pakistan); the DRA air force flew at high altitudes and generally

remained out of range, so 57mm guns were a welcome sign though we all knew that except for some psychological advantages, it was not very effective. There was no radar available, so 57mm guns could not be utilised to their full potential, and the gunners had to depend on manual sighting and operations. Nevertheless, they did play their deterrence role.

On a clear day, seeing scores of trucks bringing weapons and ammunition to the designated points without any fear of retaliation by DRA air force spoke volumes of the effectiveness of the air defence. A few years back, it just would not have been possible. We often heard some aircrafts flying overhead at very high altitude, but they did not bother us.

We had noticed that the strength of men and weapons, as told by Mujahideen commanders, generally used to be highly exaggerated. The commanders loved to have Stingers near them, more to impress others rather than for any tactical considerations. Although we knew their habits, but at times, this was very frustrating. I remember once, when I was detailed to check an Afghan Mujahid training camp near Jalalabad, I was impressed by the number of Mujahids present there. They even put up a drill show complete with a guard of honour; it would have impressed any one. After I had finished my inspection, I said goodbye, shook hands, and—apparently—returned back. However, I had some other tasks to do, and after leaving them, I did not crossover to Pakistan straightaway as expected. I was rather delayed for a couple of hours. Finally, when I returned, as soon as we got on the main road, I was surprised to see many vehicles loaded with Mujahideen, crossing back into Pakistan and, incidentally, we recognised many of them whom we had seen in the camp just a few hours ago. Probably, they had been sent from Pakistan to put up a show. As soon as they were sure I had left, they bolted back. We waved at some of the red-faced Mujahideen commanders, who also saw and recognised us. It was no surprise we had been warned of such tactics. I remember one of the Mujahid commanders telling me, ‘Ustad (teacher), this is a war which will continue for generations, so don’t push us and no need to hurry things up. We will fight it in our own way and time, and meanwhile, we have to continue our other affairs of life also.’ Actually, he had explained it very well thus: For most of those mountain people, fighting is their way of life and their entertainment and pastime also. No wonder it has remained free from permanent foreign occupation so far.

As D-Day (the day appointed by us to begin our offensive in Jalalabad) approached, the preparations from both sides were in full swing. Along the Torkham-Jalalabad Road, just ahead of the ‘Farms’ area (these were

some government-constructed farms astride of the Torkhem-Jalalabad Road known generally as Farms area or Farm-1, Farm-2, and so on). We had our forward positions or FDLs (forward defended localities), as these are called in military jargon at this place. Ahead of that, it was all no-man's-land, and we could see far away, through binoculars, some tanks in hull-down positions and a few artillery gun posts.

These tanks and guns were of great nuisance to us as they used to often fire at any movement they noticed on our side. The road remained deserted as most civilians had evacuated the area by then. One day, in the evening, I saw a civil pickup van come from our side, and before we could stop it, it had crossed our forward positions and moved towards Jalalabad. Immediately, there was tank and artillery fire from Afghan side. The pickup zigzagging aptly, dodged the fire and, finally, turned left and vanished in the broken ground somewhere in the no-man's-land. I was surprised to learn that the pickup belonged to a group of Arab fighters who were picketed between our and Afghan positions in the no-man's-land, and the vehicle was just bringing evening rations. The Arab fighters belonged to a very rich and influential tall Arab. It was rumoured that he might well have been the now famous Osama bin Laden. The vehicles bringing supplies daily, while evading the Afghan fire, had by now become a routine matter. It was indeed a very strange war. Colonel Imam once while passing through that area had met some Arab fighters who proudly showed him their graves which they had dug for themselves with their own hands. I vividly remember Major Victor (CIA Officer) telling us that 'it is very difficult to face a man who is not afraid to die.'

I am also reminded of another patch of unmetalled dusty 'kutchra' track of about three to four kilometres which passed right in front of us, parallel to our FDLs right in the no-man's-land. It was an old track used by locals to reach some of the villages located west of Jalalabad. They had some Mujahid Gun positions which had to be visited off and on by our advisers. It was the shortest route to those villages but well within sights of Afghan guns and thus very unsafe. Another hidden and much safer route also existed, but it was much longer, and Mujahideen, and sometimes even locals, preferred the shorter but open and dangerous route. That patch of open track was covered by a particular Afghan tank in hull-down position. The tank used to fire at all vehicles using that track. Mujahideen loved to use this track. Only the other day the tank had managed to hit a bus loaded with Mujahideen and civilians with a direct shot, killing all its occupants. The wreckage was visible for all of us to see. For me, it was a scary sight.

Once, I had to go to those villages; I had two other vehicles accompanying me. One was with Major Sarwar and his team, an artillery officer, a rather gung-ho type who was to check artillery gun positions which were located in those villages. The other vehicle had the local Mujahid commander who was responsible for those guns. We stopped at a place short of the dusty-road track under thick wooded cover, where we rested, and checked our vehicles before making the dash. I had decided to take the safer and longer route but, to my surprise, Major Sarwar came to me and requested that they wanted to take the open-patch route. Why? Sarwar and his team, including the driver, told me that they would never get another chance like that to go in front of enemy guns. They also pleaded that with Mujahideen commander with them, how could they take a safer route? It amounted to cowardice, according to them. That was nonsense. I think it was adventurism and bravado that was forcing them to do this. Then, to my surprise, my Stinger NCO, Dafadar Naimatullah, who was from armoured corps also joined them, explaining to me very fervently that the enemy tank, which was probably T-55, could not engage targets moving above sixty to seventy kilometres effectively. Thus if the vehicles kept their speed above seventy kilometres then there was very little chance of being hit. Then all my men pleaded to me to allow them to go through this route. Seeing their enthusiasm, I agreed reluctantly. Their faces lit up.

The vehicles were finally checked, and after a small prayer by the drivers, we moved. Major Sarwar was detailed to go in the first vehicle. The first vehicle was always thought to be the safest as generally the tank crew would not be ready. Logically, the first vehicle had more chances of catching them unaware. The second and subsequent vehicles were more liable to be hit as the first vehicle alerts them and the crew has time to take firing positions. As Sarwar left, we watched him speeding; the tank could manage only one shot, wide off the mark. Then after some time, it was my turn; Naimatullah was my driver, and he drove at full speed. We crossed the bus that had been hit a few days ago; it was totally charred. I was thinking that it could well serve as an aim-off point for the tank gunners. We crossed over safely, and then the third vehicle also arrived. That day the tank fired only five to six shots, way off the mark. Men were jubilant. Now they could brag about it back home. I felt very bad and decided in future never to allow such unnecessary risks. We tried to keep this secret from our senior officers who would have been really annoyed at such stupid risks, though I learned later that at least one of them had taken that same route quite a few times.

By March, all preparations were complete. Our only concern was the intertribal rivalry; that is, unfortunately, part and parcel of Afghan culture, and it was a big concern. We had heard that one or the other party would sometimes not adhere to the plans so as to deny credit going to a rival party. And that is exactly what happened in Jalalabad. It was common in those days for the ISI officers to hold meetings with the Mujahideen commanders at Peshawar, where different aspects of the operations were discussed and coordinated. It was after one such meeting that Brigadier Janjua asked the ISI officers present there as to how they felt about its outcome. Major Tahir, who was coordinating the meeting, very politely but bluntly opined that its chances of success were very slim because of the Mujahideen's inherent internecine and tribal rivalries. Brigadier Janjua was stunned but, nevertheless, decided to go ahead and take the chance. Perhaps he had other pressures or rather it was too late to decide otherwise. And that is what exactly happened.

Initially, all went according to the plan. Surprisingly, Summerkhel (a small garrison outpost located outside Jalalabad on the main Torkham-Jalalabad Road) was taken much sooner than expected. Soon the Mujahideen were fighting in the outskirts of Jalalabad airfield. It only seemed a matter of time before Jalalabad fell. Quite a few senior officers had by now shifted to Landikotal—a border check post at Afghan-Pak border—and had positioned themselves in the mountains nearby and waited eagerly for the good news. The good news never came. A strong Mujahideen group, which was supposed to be coming from the North, just never arrived; they simply vanished for a couple of crucial days at a time when their presence would have made a big difference. Soon the tempo slowly and slowly petered out. Some groups were missing and some never kept the plan and thus it all ended in a fiasco, as was feared but hoped against. The Afghan Mujahideen had not yet reached the stage where they could carry out conventional battles effectively. Their inter-tribal rivalries and internal tribal loyalties were too strong to allow such coordinated actions. The ISI certainly knew this aspect, but nevertheless, they took a bold chance. Perhaps this time the ISI became too ambitious to somehow get liberated a piece of land and form some sort of Independent Afghan Islamic Government as quickly as possible. It could well have been political pressure by the government that had forced them to take this chance. Thus, in their eagerness, they had overlooked many tribal aspects.

High Profile Incursion

It was in May-June of 1988, that a deep incursion was carried out by our most senior ISI officers in Afghanistan. DG, ISI (General Hameed Gul), accompanied by Brigadier Janjua, along with Brigadier Badshah and Lieutenant Colonel Kazmi (cover names), with the help of Rabbani Party, went deep inside Afghanistan to meet Ahmed Shah Masood (ASM), the famous Lion of 'Panjsheer'. Commander Rabbani (later president of Afghanistan) had lot of influence over ASM and was the go-between ISI and ASM. By then ASM had also established good contacts with the ISI. The ISI group had entered through Garam Chasma, a border town in Chitral Valley. They stayed inside for ten to fifteen days. The group took with them a strong Stinger team for their protection. The route taken was very treacherous and tricky. The mission was a complete success. Ahmed Shah Masood was very happy. On their return, Ahmed Shah Masood was dispatched about 200 to 250 truckloads of ammunition and equipment which included some Stingers also. Later on, ASM visited Pakistan at the invitation of the ISI. He stayed for quite a few days in Pakistan and visited Peshawar and Islamabad and was very well looked after by the ISI.

Lt Gen. Hameed Gul was removed from the command of the ISI in May 1989. He had lasted almost two years and two months. His words on hearing his removal were, 'I think India has won.' Yet another general totally committed to the Afghan cause was removed rather unceremoniously. Lt Gen. Shamsul Rehman Kallu (Retd) was to take over from him.

Though the new DG, ISI, had a good reputation in the army, but no one in the ISI, at least amongst junior officers, liked to be commanded by a retired person. Command of any military organisation by any retired officer somehow gave an impression of being a second-rate organisation. Moreover, he was new to this type of warfare, and it took some time for him to understand the intricacies of irregular warfare. It was difficult for him to understand as to how could a Mujahideen commander boasting of having about 1,000 fighters with him could only muster a few hundred persons on the crucial day. How one commander during the thick of battle had to go and see his sick cousin or attend some one's marriage? Or how a commander was sure that they can pass by a strong Afghan check post just because the Afghan post commander was known to him and would allow him to pass unharmed or unchecked? These and many other similar aspects are hard to understand by straightforward and disciplined soldiers.

It was a completely different working environment. It needed time to understand these things. This sometimes led to misunderstandings, and the general may have thought, at times, that he is not getting the necessary cooperation. It is always easy for the boss to blame the subordinate staff whenever the desired results are not achieved.

It was again in 1989 that Americans had sent a team of air defence experts to assess the performance of Stingers. The team comprised of a lieutenant colonel, a major, and a captain. All were from American Air Defence Artillery, Fort Bliss—the same place where our team had been trained. They were thorough professionals. They asked us a lot of questions and even went to Peshawar and Quetta to meet Mujahideen commanders and Stinger firers. The team wanted to get firsthand knowledge from the users and thus get a realistic assessment of the Stinger performance. They also discussed some future air-defence aspects and trends and battlefield techniques. The type of questions they asked also helped us a lot, and we updated our assessment and learned some new angles to it. Before departing, they invited us to the USA and visit their AD School and to discuss some other air-defence weapon systems. They were professional soldiers, and their assessment was purely from a field soldiers and operational point of view, not the technical side. The assessment and the data we had given them was later published in one of their Air Defence Artillery magazines.

The Internal Rivalry

O jealousy, thou magnifier of trifles.

(Schillet)

The ISI Training and Operations section in those days, known as JIP(S), also had its ups and downs. Initially almost all the officers posted in this section were from SSG (Special Services Group)—persons trained in unconventional warfare. They did a tremendous job in laying strong foundations of this section. Pioneers like Brigadier Ali Raza and his team also deserve a lot of credit for this. In the early days, the working of this section was kept secret, and even in the ISI people did not know what this section was up to. It was only when the task became bigger and bigger that many officers from other arms were also inducted. Mostly officers posted from other arms, especially of Major rank were not considered to be career officers. They were not expected to go very high in the normal channel. They were not bad, but certainly not of the ‘General’ material, just average Pakistani officers and men. No wonder when the Soviet withdrawal took place, one Russian war correspondent standing at the famous friendship bridge on Amu Darya, watching the Russian tanks crossing over from Afghanistan, had commented that the Soviet army has been beaten by the ragtag group of Afghans and the average Pakistani officer.’ No wonder the strength and the quality of an army is the strength and quality of its average officers. A few brilliant or weak officers do not make a standard.

I was posted to the ISI in 1984, and I did not have any inkling as to where I was going. I had not done any intelligence course, so it was rather surprising. In fact, as we learned later, the section I was posted to, that is JIP(S), was actually not doing any intelligence work as agents or spies in the usual sense. Those posted were kept for some months under

observation and then finally inducted or adjusted somewhere else. There was no forced tasking; all were volunteers. Director would, in the initial interview, enquire about the willingness to operate in foreign countries under hostile conditions, meaning Afghanistan. No one was forced; no one was chided or dubbed coward or anything like that, and everyone's views were respected. There were, at times, some who were unwilling or were simply not cut for this type of work. Most amusing was when some dashing career officer with excellent career record would, in the initial interview, brag about liking to be where the action is. But when they realised that the action in this case was not in five star hotels and exotic foreign lands as depicted in James Bond movies but in jungles and arid mountains far away from homes and civilisations for long periods of time, with good chances of losing life or limb, they simply backed out. This was not the place for promotion or career-conscious officers.

The only time when there were hundred percent officers and men volunteering for action was when there was a rumour that India was considering sending its troops in Afghanistan to assist Russians and Afghans. These volunteers, dubbed average or high average by MS branch, were truly the silent and unsung heroes of this nation, who took large risks willingly. However, to be fair, their services were indeed at times recognised by the government, and many were awarded medals like S.Bt (Sitara-i-Basalat) or T.Bt (Tamgha-i-Basalat), equivalent to US Silver Star or British Military Cross. These soldiers were generally quiet, unassuming type, who would be lost in a crowd. Maybe someday this nation will honour and recognise the services of these men.

It also goes to the credit of the commanders, especially of Training and Operations like Col Sultan Amir and directors like Brigadier Yousaf and Brigadier Janjua and DGs, ISI, like Akhtar Abdur Rehman and Hameed Gul who actually made the so-called average officers perform outstandingly. Simply put, when the commanders themselves are committed to a cause and a mission, then the spirit is automatically and effectively inculcated down in the troops. Thus almost every junior officer and men in those days believed strongly that it was a war of survival for Pakistan.

The CIA was the first one to recognise and appreciate the services of the ISI and especially of the Training and Operations section. In acknowledgment of this, they soon presented three beautiful trophies to the ISI to be presented to different officers—Colonel Imam being one of them—each having a piece of Berlin Wall with the now-famous inscription, 'In recognition of being the first one to strike the blow'. The breaking

down of the Berlin Wall was considered as a consequence of the fall of Soviet Union. They acknowledged the fact that the fall of Berlin Wall was, in reality, the result of the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan.

The trophy that was presented to Colonel Imam had the following inscription below the Berlin-Wall piece ' . . . With Deepest Respect To One Who Helped Deliver The First Blow'. Colonel Imam was a soldier and a gentleman right to the end. A man totally dedicated to the Afghan cause! The CIA in those days were highly impressed by him and thought very high of him. Sadly, in 2010, he was kidnapped by an unknown and unheard-of group calling themselves as Asian Tigers, a splinter of TPP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) or Lashkar-i-Jhangvi. They claimed to have killed him on 23 January 2011 on some trumped-up charges. Ostensibly he was killed by them when they failed to receive any ransom.

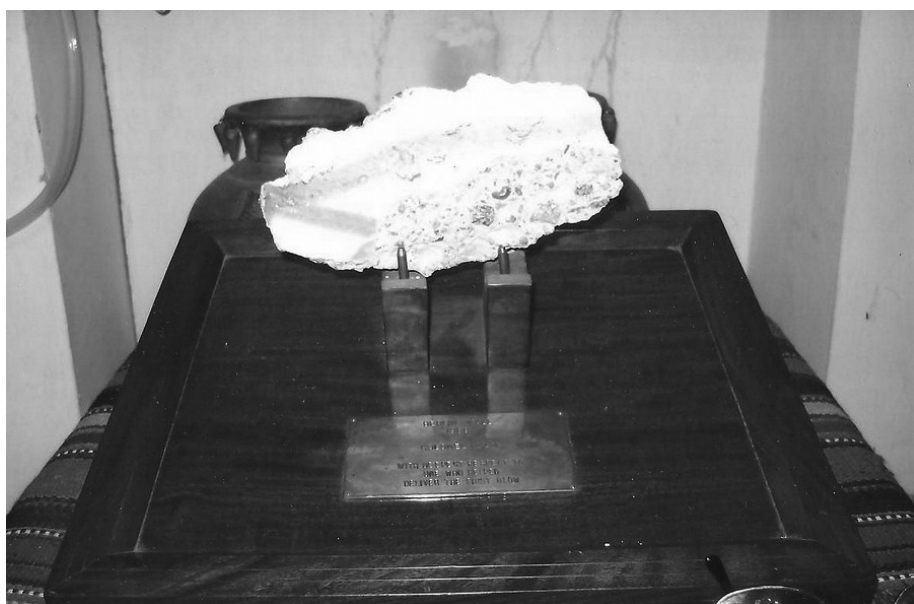
This was too much for some of our fellows to swallow. It was then when for the first time we saw the proverbial 'professional jealousy' at work.

We were warned about such elements but also told that such people always exist and are more or less part and parcel of almost every organisation. It was told to us by our seniors thus: 'Success often breeds jealousy and envy—a trait that is, unfortunately, rather common in this part of the world, but one can achieve anything provided one does not care who gets the credit.'

Thus most of us worked without any consideration as to who gets the credit, as long as it was in Pakistan's interest, and remained oblivious to the wrangling of others.

A group of persons, even then, existed in our bureau who were not really committed to the cause. They doubted every achievement of the Afghans and made much of their shortcomings and failings. Luckily, they were in minority and could not do any better than simple bickering. Nevertheless, such a group did exist even then. Apparently, the success and achievements of this section had aroused lot of professional jealousies in some people inside as well as outside our bureau.

These persons, some of whom had reached senior positions, often denied credit or recognition to even their own men and downplayed their achievements as best as they could. Just to quote an example, I remember that the Americans were obsessed by IL-76 (Soviet Transport Jet). They desperately wanted it to be shot down, somehow. To be frank, so did we. Different theories were spelled out. Some suggested that perhaps the Mujahideen could not estimate the range to target properly as it was a huge aircraft and seemed much nearer to the firer while being still out of



Trophy presented to Colonel Imam by the CIA



The caption on the trophy presented to Colonel Imam by the CIA.

range. Others thought that perhaps IL-76s counter measures were very effective. Any way we started seriously thinking about this. It was finally decided by the ISI and CIA to down an IL-76 right in Kabul during their landings. This meant that the firing team had to be placed inside Kabul city. Thus a serious effort was started to find someone who had good access to Kabul. While our operations staff searched for such persons, we got on with the planning part of it. A video film of the IL-76 landings at Kabul airport was procured through our agents. The video was about two hours' duration and gave us a clear and detailed picture. It was observed that IL-76s, while taking off or landing, had minimum of two and maximum of four MI-24s as escorts, flying either side of the runway. The IL-76s flew in a tight corkscrew circular fashion till they reached 10,000 to 15000 feet AGL and then departed from the area. They used to drop either single flares, having a gap of five to six seconds interval in between them, or fired multiple four-way flares; these flares were spread over 100-200 metres, with a three to five seconds' interval. Finally, after months of preparations, a suitable position was selected and a special team of three men was selected and trained vigorously.

It was on 27 March 1990 that I received a call from Colonel Imam. He was in Khost at that time. He was very excited and asked me if I had heard the latest news from BBC. Then he told me about BBC reporting, downing of an IL-76 at Kabul air port. He was sure that our boys had done it. That year, that is in 1990, not one but two IL-76 aircrafts crashed in Kabul. The first one was on 27 March 1990 (Sr.No:78781) and the second one was on 12 June 1990 (Sr. No. 86905). Our intelligence set-up refused to give any credit to the training section or more likely to Colonel Imam. They simply disposed off the claim by saying that the aircraft had crashed due to a technical fault (despite the fact that a missile fire had been reported from within the city). The Mujahid commander whose men had done this was naturally annoyed with us and remained so for quite some time.

It was again in 1990 that the CIA officers, during one of the meetings, informed me that they would like us to give some lectures to their Special Forces in the USA and NATO (West Germany) on how we had imparted Stinger training to the Mujahideen and to share our experiences in training of irregular forces with their Special Forces. I was naturally very excited and personally thought that it would have been a great opportunity and honour for our country and organisation. But for some reasons this visit was denied despite repeated requests from the CIA. Some seniors sitting in our headquarters simply pooh-poohed the idea for some strange logic of their own.

We had, by this time, the new Benazir government who at that time was generally thought to be somewhat averse to the Mujahideen. They naturally equated the Afghan Mujahids with Zia-ul-Haq. General Zia was very popular with Afghan Mujahids—the person they hated most, for obvious reasons. After the Jalalabad fiasco and removal of Gen. Hameed Gul from the ISI, a number of stories had started circulating in those days; many of them could have been spread purposely by some concerned sections to bring discredit to the Afghan policy by discrediting the Afghan Mujahids.



In those days, people were often heard arguing that Pakistan had probably joined Afghan War only at the behest of America. Nothing could have been further from the truth. For a change this time, it was the other way around. This time, it was America who was keen to join us, after seeing the determination of the Pakistani people. To most of the Pakistanis and especially those working in the ISI, it seemed very obvious that the Russians were not going to just stop in Kabul.

Afghanistan was just a staging post for onward Russian expansion. It was common saying in those days in the media—especially the Western press—that ‘the Russians just never go back’. General Zia had, in fact, once rightly said, ‘We are fighting our war in Afghanistan.’

The ISI was positive that it was not just a fight for the freedom of Afghanistan, but it was indeed a fight for the survival of Pakistan too. They were—and still are—convinced that, had the Soviets not been impeded in Afghanistan, then probably by now Pakistan would have become a Soviet vassal state. Children in schools would have been learning Russian language, singing Russian songs, and chanting praises of Communism. Maybe Pakistan would still be fighting another war—though this one against Western Capitalism. A different war, in a different scenario and with different characters, but a war nevertheless.

There would still be critics and pointed fingers. Writers and analysts would most probably still be castigating Pakistanis this time for not standing up and fighting for their country and beliefs. And the world would have most definitely been a very different place. It seemed to us that subsequent governments’ immature and callous handling of the Afghan situation and their diverse ideologies had resulted in successfully demolishing the historical and God-given opportunity that Providence had so kindly dealt us. Eventually, we were to pay a heavy price for the envy, rivalries, and short-sighted approach of our subsequent governments. Our political leadership just wasted precious time in bickering and infighting and blaming others for their faults, a habit which they seem to have adopted.

Cutting Down of the ISI

As a moth gnaws a garment, so does envy consume a man.

(St Chrysostom)

Earlier when President Ghulam Ishaq had dismissed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government, he had developed some hidden fears that the ISI had rogue elements within which might do something. Who had fed him this notion? It was perhaps none other than the CIA, which had certain fears and thus had strong reasons to clip down the ISI, since its mission had been accomplished.

However, it seems that later on this theme was also picked up by different political parties for their own ends, and it was much trumpeted about by them. Perhaps, Ghulam Ishaq had some guilty feelings about removing Nawaz Sharif's government. He certainly felt apprehensive and feared that the ISI may do something detriment to his interests. Some quarters had already publicised apprehensions about the fearsome growing capability of the ISI. After all, their achievement of causing Russian retreat from Afghanistan was something which could not be sidelined as an ordinary matter, and no doubt, the CIA overplayed on these fears. They always doubted persons with religious inclinations, especially amongst Muslims. Maybe, President Ishaq Khan was convinced by some of his advisors that the ISI could become a force behind the scene to dislodge him.

CIA by then was naturally worried about the ISI's future role and where it could be next employed. They could not allow the ISI to become a viable machinery, which could be engaged in stopping US influence in this area. Of course, the American interest would have been to see themselves as playing a major economic role in this area, which has the potential of

becoming the hub of activities for a market of more than three billion people, provided the infrastructure was given and peace prevailed.

It seems that the CIA playing on these fears of President Ghulam Ishaq may have suggested a solution. This could have been started by dubbing those officers who mattered, as fundamentalists and dangerous, and best to be shunted out.

When President Ghulam Ishaq discussed this matter with COAS General Kakar, a solution was found in the shape of Lt Gen. Javed Ashraf Qazi.

Thus, in May 1993, Lt Gen. Javed Ashraf Qazi took over from Lieutenant General Nasir with a clear mission.

Lieutenant General Nasir had visited the Stinger School in early 1993 and had a detailed briefing on the working and the operations side. He was so impressed that, as an incentive, he awarded 'Umra to me and Major Shoaib and also requested MS branch to ensure that we remained with the ISI till maximum age service. MS branch readily agreed to this proposal, and it was also communicated by MS branch to our HQs.

When Gen. Javed Ashraf took over as DG, ISI, he was apparently given the task of purging the ISI of so-called Islamists and to ensure that the ISI did not behave as a state within a state (as told to him by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan) and to reign in the 'Jihadis' (religious fighters) in Kashmir. General Ashraf got on the job and did this in a very efficient and ruthless manner, for destroying something is the easiest thing in Pakistan, especially when the most important post is held with mala fide intentions.

Lt Gen. Javed Ashraf Qazi's method was simple. He immediately sidelined all those persons who were dubbed as outstanding officers by previous DGs, ISI. Persons who had been working for a number of years and had accumulated lot of experience over a period of many years were overnight dubbed as unfit and no longer required. It was done at a very fast and massive scale. As a bonus, some of these officers were at times humiliated also. Lieutenant General Nasir was sent a letter by the ISI headquarters advising him that while vacating the official residence, he should ensure that no official items were taken away by him—a simple way of discrediting and mentally tormenting him. Such letters, under normal circumstances, are unthinkable in Pakistan Army.

It was often talked whether such orders were actually passed by DG, ISI, or not, or was it a simple case of subordinates acting more loyal than the king or a case of being more Catholic than the Pope. Whatever it may be, it was done during Lt Gen. Javed Ashraf Qazi's watch in a very vexatious taste.

For example, first it was ordered that everyone was to put on uniform which meant that our section, which was officially not allowed uniform due to nature of its task, overnight, became a military outpost to the astonishment of many civilians living around. The BBC, in those days, carried out the news thus: 'It seems that the new director general was going to militarise the ISI.' One day, it was ordered that all persons will be in uniform; thus we could see uniformed drivers in civil vehicles which were used at times for cover duties. When it was felt that something was wrong with this, then it was ordered that drivers would be without uniform but not the user of the transport—he still had to be in uniform. This was the way things were done in a slipshod manner in those days.

Many of those with a religious tinge were especially targeted.

In 1993, about five officers from the ISI had gone to perform Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca, a ritual which all Muslims try to make at least once in their lives). All of them on their return found their posting orders waiting for them and in one or two cases with a number of reminders. Out of the five officers, one or two had only recently joined the ISI and had served only for about a year or even less in the ISI, while a brigadier, who had only two months left before retirement, was also posted out. Apparently, performing Hajj had become an indication of fundamentalism.

There were en masse dining outs, ostensibly, to cut down the expenditure. Quite a few senior officers, more than half a dozen, were dined out in one go. Officers in many cases were not even given enough time to properly hand over their assignments. The posted out officers could only retain the official residences for only about fifteen days. It was even talked that one brigadier who had not yet received his posting order was dined out, just in anticipation. I myself had not received any posting order but was told to move on an old posting order which had been cancelled by MS branch about a year or so ago. Officers were given their move orders before even getting their clearance; such was the so-called urgency to purge them. One brigadier was called to the ISI headquarters for some briefing and, after the briefing, he was quietly told that he was being dined out that very evening. So this was the way things were done in those days. The lower staff, sensing their superior's mood, perhaps acted a little bit more than their mandate, but the damage had been done. Professional jealousy also played its part in it. For some officers who were biased against the Afghan cause, it was a pleasure to see all this, and they took on this task with a relish. A few persons like Colonel Imam and Major Shoaib did survive this purge, but the overall story was the same. The ISI

was definitely cut down. In those days we used to joke that some of our generals are more of a terror for their own people and country rather than their country's enemies.

According to some estimates, scores of officers and men were purged out. Such large scale expulsions in a very short span of time would definitely affect the efficiency of any organisation. No institution, however strong, can remain unaffected if treated this way.

Soon after these events, a news item appeared that America had decided to remove Pakistan from its watch list of terrorist sponsoring states. Apparently satisfied that their demands had been met and the ISI was now sufficiently clipped. With hindsight it seems that the whole of the ISI was punished or distorted for perhaps the flaws of a political section that worked somewhere in the ISI headquarters.

The Stinger section also could not escape this punishment. The Stinger School after the Soviet withdrawal used to be often visited by important personalities. Officers of Training and Operation section had very proudly set up an impressive trophy room in the School which housed many weapons, equipment, etc. captured in Afghanistan. This trophy room was very frequently visited by the Americans. At times, they would put up a request to take some of captured equipment to the USA for their evaluation and analysis. Mostly their requests were complied with. But, soon after the purge, a new trend had set in. The Stinger school had now become less important, a pariah, if you would. It was sidelined, and the officer in charge of the Stinger museum was simply told by one of the deputy director general of the ISI to not take more than a minute when it came to briefings about the Stingers. 'We are not selling Stingers here,' were his instructions.

Later on, all trophies, equipment, weapons, etc. placed in the trophy room were rounded up and dispersed to different places. Some were sent to Army Museum in Rawalpindi. Some were to different training schools, and still some were sent to the ISI training camps. It didn't really matter where they were sent. They had to be out of sight. Perhaps the idea was to shut down this facility completely. The Stinger training equipment had survived the Ojhri Camp blast and was still somewhat in working condition. Finally, the ISI authorities also ordered to dispatch the Stinger training equipment that had survived the Ojhri camp blast to someplace, just where it could not be seen. But hats off to some SSG officers who had escaped the 'purge' and knew its importance and taking advantage of a lacuna in the orders, quietly shifted these to a safer place taking a lot of risk for themselves.

The importance of saving this equipment was realised during the eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with India during General Musharraf's time, during some sort of covert general mobilisation when someone remembered about the Stingers. One day I was suddenly called from my retired life by the ISI. I was requested to report to my old headquarters. War with India at that time seemed imminent. Of course, the ISI by then wanted desperately to train some people for the war which seemed just around the corner. It was good to be back in business. I was sent to one of our old training facilities. I was happily surprised to see my old colleagues and old training team already there. Called from faraway places, most were living a peaceful retired life. All had arrived on their own, under their own expenses, without wasting any time. Their patriotism and enthusiasm was indeed praiseworthy.

Soon the team got busy in making the training equipment operational. Of course, this time they needed some help from the Air Defence Command. The training started in earnest. It was there when I learned how one of the directors of the ISI had ordered to roll up the Stinger School, and these officers took a stand for Pakistan. These were the officers for whom Pakistan always came first, and it is lucky that we still have such dedicated men in our armed forces.

The Working of the CIA

None but a fool is always right.

I was posted in the Training and Operations section of the Afghan Bureau in the ISI. The first day, as I entered Lieutenant Colonel Salman's office (the officer in charge of operations and training), I was surprised to see that his office was in a huge barrack, which was shared by two of his staff officers. The barrack walls had lot of maps hanging on them. These maps covered almost all aspects of Afghanistan's demography. They even covered things like suitability of irregular force operations, rock structures, vegetations, cultural density, suitability for underground installations, drainage characteristics, and so on. These maps had been prepared by the Americans and handed over to us. In fact, anything about Afghanistan was available in map form. Surprisingly, the analysis of different aspects of Afghan terrain and its people as done by the CIA strongly suggested that Afghan terrain was not fit for guerrilla warfare and any insurgency was most likely bound to fail eventually. No wonder, at that time the Americans seriously considered leaving Afghanistan to Russian sphere of influence. But to be fair, their assessments were based on their Vietnam experiences, which had very thick foliage, jungles, and rivers, very unlike Afghanistan. Colonel Salman, a very quiet, efficient, and experienced SSG officer briefed me somewhat about all these things. He told me that during WWII, the allied forces had realised that they needed some time to prepare their fighting forces and thus developed techniques to fight superior forces. 'Irregular operations' as they are called nowadays. And the then head of the CIA, William J. Casey, who was normally referred to as Mr Black in Pakistan, was an ex-OSS man from WWII, and many of his colleagues were also from those times. President Carter had almost written off Afghanistan and thought it best to be left under Soviet influence. It was only, when

Mr Reagan took over as the president that a new American thinking had emerged. These old WWII vintage soldiers were eager to pay back the Soviets for the humiliation they had suffered in Vietnam. They had found an opportunity to do so in Afghanistan. We could see how Americans readily utilised the experiences of their veterans, unlike Pakistan.

During my stay in the ISI, we were in close contact with the CIA officers, and it was quite an experience working with them. Surely, this was of benefit to both the countries. While working with them, over a period of time, we learned many things from them as indeed, they must have also learned many things from us.

American Embassy in those days normally had a CIA station chief with four or five officers permanently stationed in Islamabad. These officers were concerned with training and operation matters only. In those days, only these officers were permitted to interact directly with us, and all other Americans had to come through them.

The station chief was normally a senior and experienced officer, selected carefully. Mr Milton Bearden was the station chief from 1986 to 1989. He was an intelligent person and knew Pakistani customs and history and the Afghan situation very well, and we really felt that he was on our side. Unlike some others, he kept his own officers also under strict check. Once a new young officer from US had somewhat behaved arrogantly with one of our officers. When Mr Bearden came to know about this, he was very angry, and the American officer was sent back home immediately. He thus earned a lot of respect from the ISI officers. After Mr Bearden left, he was replaced by Mr Harry L. Weatherbee, another fine and intelligent officer. Mr Weatherbee understood well the working environment and the Afghan insurgency. He, along with his team, merged as natural allies with their Pakistani counterparts very conveniently. He remained the station chief till I left the ISI in 1993. Of and on, a number of American persons would also come on short assignments to train or to discuss operational or training related matters.

It seemed that in those days the CIA used to induct persons from different categories. For instance, there used to be civilians, soldiers, experts in different fields. All categories of inductees had their own characteristics and mindset. Just like the ISI, the CIA also used to induct quite a few officers from their Special Forces. These were the main CIA people we worked with, at our level, most of the time. Generally these officers were on attachment with the CIA for a limited period, though some were at times inducted permanently. They were normally of mid-level

ranks. We found it very easy to interact with them. These regular or career military officers were sound and well behaved. They had lot of things common with our officers. They cribbed about their seniors just like we did at times. They were as worried about their promotions as were some of our officers. They used to share same kind of jokes with us. They did not trust Indians and somehow always doubted their (India's) military prowess and their mindset. They often criticised Israel—I remember very well that during our training in the USA, one of the conducting officers told me that, in his opinion, 'All American problems are only because of Israel.' They did not like the Iranians at all, especially the 'Shias'. They seemed more or less averse to the British as well and made lot of fun of them privately. It was more of a love-hate relationship between them. They often jokingly said that whenever the British are in trouble, they always come to Papa (US) for help. They held very low opinion of some Arab, African, and Asian nations. To top it all, they considered themselves much superior in conduct and behaviour to the politicians and civilians, even of their own country. They hated almost all politicians and were consequently as mistrusted in their embassy and civil circles as was the Trainings and Operations branch in the ISI mistrusted by its own people.

In fact, because of these common grounds, getting along with them was very easy. These CIA and ISI officers had integrated so well that it felt like one unit. I remember once Brigadier Yousaf called Lieutenant Colonel Travis and gave him a good dressing on some security breach (an American magazine had carried photographic news of Stingers being sent to Afghanistan). When Colonel Travis came back, in a good supportive manner he related all, he had received from Brigadier Yousaf, and concluded that he felt like he was back in the Marines boot camp. This is only possible when lot of understanding exists.

The American officers, before they took up their assignments, were well briefed in our customs, habits, and what was to be their conduct and line in official matters, much unlike our officers, who learned things mostly on the job. So clued-up were they on our customs that once during the Blowpipe course, at lunch time, we felt some tension. Later on, one of their captains told me that their CO had noticed him eating with his left hand as he had forgotten that in Muslim countries one eats only with his right hand.

Lieutenant Colonel Travis was their senior most Training and Operations officer, and then he had Major Victor, Captain Steve, and Colonel Falcon (Retd) as permanently posted officers (these were probably their cover

names). Sometimes they stayed in camps with us, especially whenever some new equipment was inducted to train Pakistani instructors only. When they went with us to the camps, they wore 'salwar kameez' with 'Chitralli' cap and 'Peshawari chappals'; this way, they remained inconspicuous. However, for normal meetings, which were generally held in the ISI headquarters, they used to come in Western dress. These meetings were normally held in one of the meeting rooms next to DG, ISI's office. These meeting rooms were often bugged. Once during a meeting with the station chief, we noticed a small bugging device, which was tapped under a table got loose and was hanging down limply. Luckily the station chief was sitting in a position from where neither he nor his staff officer could observe it; otherwise, it would have caused a lot of embarrassment.

During all these meetings, they often used to convey us many things surreptitiously (sometimes inadvertently but mostly intentionally). Things, which they knew would eventually get reported. We learnt of many events happening in our country through them. For example, once they told us, 'Your ambassador in Washington is only interested in shopping trips, nothing else,' with a tinge of disappointment in his voice (Ms Abida Hussain was our ambassador in those days).

At another time, we learned that they had arranged a course for some police officers, and the Police Department had sent only very senior or old police officers who were more worried about shopping rather than learning anything, and the training was a waste of time. At one time, they even revealed to us how one embassy of a Far-Eastern country in Islamabad was minting money by selling liquor to some Pakistanis illegally and so on and so forth. Maybe, that was one of their ways of conveying things to us without themselves coming into limelight and without disturbing the diplomatic norms. We dutifully passed on all such information to our superiors as we were bound to. This type of information was normally passed down when the official meetings had ended and the officers waited for their transports to arrive. At that time the atmosphere used to be more relaxed, and one or two officers waited on them as a matter of protocol to see them off.

One thing we had noticed was that often these mid-level American officers would request for meetings for very trivial things and then prolong it unnecessarily, having mostly a leisurely cup of tea. In fact, their requests for meetings with our officers were so frequent and for such petty matters that it sometimes hindered even our normal working. When they had become somewhat familiar and friendly, they revealed to us the reasons for their frequent visits. It was very simple. For each visit, they used to get

approximately \$300 per person as their daily allowance (DA) in those days. Like I said, they had many things common with us.

They also seemed very keen to be friendly and eager to socialise with our officers and their families. Of course, that was not possible. 'No fraternisation with foreigners' was the basic rule for our men, and our agencies kept a very strict watch over this.

Major Victor, who was also looking after the CIA's interests in Egypt (as he had told us), often complained to us that if the Egyptians could provide him an office in their headquarters, why could not the Pakistanis do the same? That is providing him a separate office in the ISI headquarters with an ID card. That way he would not have to go through the long process of first making a request, then waiting for its acceptance, and only then being able to proceed. It was a sound request, but it had lot of risks involved, so it was never accepted.

They also had a lot of gung-ho like attitude and wanted to act more like James Bond. I remember once I had to give a Stinger night sight to a certain Afghan commander, and the American counterpart wanted me to ring up the embassy at certain time and leave a message saying something like 'the cup of tea is ready'. Now that message could have been sent more securely and much faster through our normal procedures. But he wanted to create some sort of impression on someone in the embassy. (Normally our officers were not permitted to ring up the embassy directly.)

Off and on, MI-6, the British secret service also played James Bond type of games. Once I remember, Brigadier Janjua passed some information to British MI-6 officers. Those British officers in turn passed on the same information to the Americans, posing as if they had got the information with great difficulty through their own very secret network. Later, during one of the meetings with us when Major Victor learned that the British had simply got the information from Brigadier Janjua, Victor was furious. He was aghast at the way the British had tried to dramatise things. Perhaps the MI-6 was trying to heap some favour on the CIA.

They also had the same office or internal rivalries like we have here in Pakistan. One of their officers, who was affiliated with the Stinger programme told me, rather sadly, that someone else from the State Department was taking all the credit for the success of this (Stinger) programme. That other person was in White House and was showered with lot of praise by President Reagan when the US president was shown the video of the actual downing of a Soviet helicopter by Stinger.

Because of this mutual cooperation and sharing of information, the CIA and the ISI both benefited a lot from each other's expertise, experience, and knowledge. The ISI in those days often used to carry out testing of some American and British weapon systems and equipment in field conditions. Thus only Pakistani or Afghan lives were risked. They were more like guinea pigs for them. Some of the systems and items that the ISI had tested for them are given in subsequent paragraphs.

General Behaviour and Conduct

Like all societies and organisations, the CIA also had its share of good and bad persons. Between 1987 and 1989, we had sent quite a few officers and men from the ISI to the USA for training. The debriefings and reports of these men helped us a lot in understanding their nature and psyche. The general impression most of them gathered about the Americans was that America is simply a business-minded nation. A country of business and merchant mentality, if you like. And like all businessmen, they always think about profits first. If it pays to speak truth, they will do so. However, if it benefits them to tell lies or to break promises, they will do so and indeed have done so quite often. They had, in fact, often conveyed to us quite openly that America is only true to its own interests and nothing else matters. So in dealing with the American politicians, one must see as to what profit or advantage they may be working towards or have in their minds. None of their aid or help ever comes without strings. Many a times we thought that they were spending money foolishly, but only later did we find that they were not foolish at all, at least, in money matters. Rather we were naïve in understanding them and their working methods. They belong to a culture where the attitude is, 'What is mine is mine, and I need not share it with you.' One should never ask for any undue favours from the Americans. If someone did that, he might be obliged but then would lose respect in their sights and would be made to pay dearly sometime later in some way. They always get 'their pound of flesh'. Anyone who shows any weakness or cowardice or lack of loyalty, or character is not respected by them at all, they take full advantage of such faults and weaknesses. Being shrewd people, they might and often do shower lots of praises and favours on such persons, while deep down, they would actually despise them. They believe that anyone not loyal to his own soil is not trustworthy at all. In the

murky game of espionage they do take advantage of such persons but in the end they are dispensable.

They have great delusions of grandeur about themselves, and it is very rare and difficult for them to say 'sorry' or to apologise, even when they know that they have done something wrong as they believe that it is bad for their super-power image.

Some other peculiar traits that we had observed about them over a number of years that we worked with them are as enumerated below:

- **Professional Credibility:** We worked mostly with American soldiers drawn from their Special Forces, Marines, etc. These persons were actually not spies or agents, but simple soldiers working basically as advisers. They were all very proud of their country and very patriotic. They were professionally sound and generally well disciplined but, at the same time, very career conscious. I remember that immediately after the first Gulf War, all American contacts were stopped by them for security reasons, and they were stopped from moving about freely in Pakistan. Once we had to take a few American civilians to a camp for a special task. I and another officer were detailed to conduct and escort them. However, we were surprised when the American team came along with a powerful wireless set. It was installed in our vehicle in which their leader was travelling. It had direct access with the American embassy, and it was installed by them, just in case something went wrong. The team leader had a very bad stomach that day, and all his team mates were making fun of this. On our way back, the leader had tremendous pressure and told us to stop the vehicle as he wanted to go to the bush. It was no problem; we were in thick jungle like area. So we stopped the vehicle, but the amazing thing was that he never got out of the vehicle till he was granted permission by someone from the embassy to ease himself, and of course, the procedures took quite some time. And when finally he was cleared, he rushed outside clutching a roll of toilet papers amid a roar of laughter by his colleagues. Whatever it was, it showed the American concern for their men and also their discipline. It was, as later explained by one of them, that their higher ups are in the habit of often overdoing things.

- **Racialism and Arrogance:** Though generally the men we worked with were careful not to show such symptoms, but it definitely exists to quite an extent. Arrogance is a common trait of many of them, especially when they are interacting with persons from Third World countries. They also showed some sort of discrimination against coloured or black people, even against persons in their own ranks. During my eight years working with them, we came across only two or three coloured persons and that too of low ranks (NCO level ranks) and for a very short spell of time. We never came across any black or coloured officer associated with this project during our tenure. The first time I had noticed this attitude was right in the USA. I remember one of the guards (a white sentry) posted outside our rooms would make sure that he would never say 'sir' to us, until and unless his own officers were present nearby. He behaved as if he was doing a favour to us by being sentry on us. But to be fair, we never wore our ranks though we were in American uniforms. It may have confused him as to who we really were. Luckily he was removed quickly from that duty. Some of those persons who would come on short stints to CIA, the experts, or such like people showed this trait to a great extent. One of their young white officers, who had become friendly with us, even went to the extent of quoting a famous American who had concluded that most of the crimes in America were committed by coloured or black people, or putting it differently, if there were no blacks in America, then the crime rates would fall down considerably. The worst experience our officers had was when one of them tried to bully one of our officers for no good reason. One of our officers, Major Aleem, who had gone to oversee the Drone training and its system performance in the USA was unnecessarily shouted upon and bullied by one of the CIA officers (named Jim Shtol or something). Aleem had simply reported to Brigadier Janjua in Islamabad that the autopilot of the Drone System was faulty and, in its present state, would not work properly. Brigadier Janjua conveyed this to Mr Weatherbee in Islamabad, who, in turn, got after Jim, and Jim, just blew his top. He started shouting at Major Aleem right outside the motel (Days Inn) somewhere in Fortworth Texas where the entire team was staying. Our officers, along with the Afghan team, had assembled just outside the motel, waiting to be taken for some outing to a circus or somewhere. Jim was very

rude and did not even show normal manners. But he had made a mistake on picking up on Major Aleem. Aleem refused to be cowed down and told Jim that he was only doing what he was sent to the USA to do, which is to give his own assessment and observation. He cancelled the outing and demanded to be immediately put through with some higher authority in the State Department or CIA headquarters, in the same tone in which Jim had talked to him. This row created lot of bad taste, but soon, Jim realised his mistake. He rather quickly apologised for his behaviour and from then on, his attitude changed completely, and he became very respectful and polite. From thence onwards there was no problem faced by this group. We only came to know later, the reason behind Jim's rude behaviour. He and some of his pals, with the help of some senators, had obtained about three million dollars for this project (Drone). They had spent most of it and had nothing worthwhile to show against it. Their first attempt in which they, for the first time, went inside Afghanistan had failed miserably despite our warnings. This time they were desperate for this system to succeed or at least to give some sort of face-saving performance. Thus he remained mostly tensed and considered Major Aleem as somewhat of a spoiler. They generally held very low opinion of the Third World countries, especially of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and often made fun of Middle Eastern and Arab countries. And if they could afford it, they loved to show their arrogance. If one showed any weakness, they would take full advantage of that. At least, once I know of them taking to task one of our senior officers who was caught on the wrong footing. They never liked their opinion to be challenged, especially by persons from the Third World countries. Maybe it hurt their ego. A number of times we had proved them wrong. But they often forced many of their decisions on us. The Blowpipe incident, the Drones debacle, the Oerlikon guns, etc. showed their attitude. However, to be fair, their regular military officers always respected our opinion, but unfortunately, they themselves were often ignored. To us, it appeared that their opinions never mattered much to the decision makers.

- **Materialism and Power of Money:** Another characteristic we noticed was that the Americans always talked in terms of money. If we were discussing shooting down an IL-76, they would comment

on the cost of the aircraft, plus the cost of pilot training, etc. If some tanks were destroyed, they would always tell us as to how much it was costing the Soviet. This sort of thinking in terms of money only was very, very, alien to our officers and men. To be honest, it is probable that no one understands the power of money better than the Americans and, especially the CIA. After the first Gulf War in 1991, when Iraqi forces had surrendered, the American forces had captured a lot of ammunition and equipment. They quickly put two and two together and realised that it would take a great effort, time, and money to demolish them, so they came up with the idea of shipping some of those weapons to Pakistan for onward dispatch to Afghan Mujahideen. That way, they hoped to save a lot of money and simultaneously oblige the Mujahideen also. All sorts of weapons, including tanks, Artillery guns (like D-30s, 130mm, 105 mm, 100mm and 152mm), plus AA guns (like 57mm, 37mm single and double barrel, 14.5 mm, double barrel and quads, etc.) were shipped to Pakistan. Once taken over by the ISI, they were shifted to different field training camps, where they were repaired and made operational. Afghan Mujahideens were then trained on these weapons, and finally, it was handed over to them. It was amazing to see a tank being repaired somewhere in a remote and godforsaken place, then being loaded on a tank transporter which was got from somewhere by our logistics staff, and then one young officer or JCO, and in certain cases even a Senior NCO, with one or two persons would take it right up to the border, and in some cases, well inside Afghanistan. Same was the case with medium and heavy guns. These ISI officers and men made this look so easy that it was indeed amazing. (Most of these officers were removed in the purge when it came in 1993.) Thus this way we had managed to raise a number of artillery and AA batteries on conventional lines, complete with uniforms. Many of these guns and tanks were eventually used in Jalalabad operations. At another time, I remember in one of our meetings the station chief, Mr Bearden, once remarked that the days of James Bond type of agents is almost over. All one had to do was to promise a green card or something like that, and people, especially of the Third World countries would come breaking down the doors, ready to give any help or information. Later they seemed to have utilised this aspect greatly in Pakistan also to recruit informers. Especially

once when they realised that despite lot of advancement in technical intelligence, it could not and cannot completely eliminate the importance of human intelligence. They had assessed earlier that most Pakistanis, or rather Asians, are generally family men and quite concerned about the future of their children. So they would often go about by asking about their kids and where they were studying and any problems they might have faced in getting admissions in foreign colleges or universities, seemingly innocent social talks but with a sinister purpose. No wonder that at least in Pakistan one can see lot of persons in high positions having dual nationalities with most having their children studying in foreign universities. Interestingly, the *Daily News* of 7 June 2011 carried an article by Mr Amir Mir which stated thus: ‘... there are those who believe that the ground intelligence could have been provided by the members of the Spider Group, consisting of retired Pakistani Military and intelligence officials assisting the American CIA in hunting down fugitive Al-Qaeda leaders. The CIA has recruited hundreds of retired Khakis as moles in the Pakistani tribal areas to provide real time intelligence on the movement of the fugitive Al-Qaeda and Taliban Militants.’

- **Gift of the Gab and Use of Catchy Phrases:** This was something which initially seemed very confusing to us and amounted to more or less something like hypocrisy. Once we were told of a special ‘Sniper Rifle’ (14.5mm Buffalo Gun) that we were to get. It had a range of over one kilometre and was considered very suitable to hit aircrafts parked on the tarmac. After we were trained on it, we eagerly waited to receive them, but it was delayed for quite sometime. When asked as to the cause of delay, we were surprised to learn that someone in the Congress or their system had objected to the name ‘Sniper Rifle’ and wanted its name to be changed. ‘Sniper’ seemed a bit too gruesome, so it was now to be called ‘Anti-Material Weapon’. And the process of changing its nomenclature on all the papers was causing the delay. Apparently the change of name was for the satisfaction of someone back home, while at the same time, ensuring that the purpose or aim of this weapon was not compromised or changed in any way. We also noted that most of them (the CIA staff) indeed had this proverbial ‘gift of the gab’—the ability to talk about nothing or anything for

any length of time in a convincing manner. I remember that during briefings, they often took more than half an hour or so in simply telling us that a Russian convoy had moved out of say, Logar or Kabul. They would often waste lot of our time by explaining as to how cleverly they had deduced the destination of a convoy by the fact that the convoy was facing in that particular direction. During our normal meetings or during their visits to our camps or training areas, they used to ask lot of questions and often repeated the same question many times. This was probably done with the intention that the more questions one asks, there are more chances of learning something new or of the other side making a slip somewhere. Thus divulging very little about themselves or their intentions and, meanwhile, learning as much of others as was possible. They often called bribes when being given to others as 'incentives' or rewards. If someone was unfaithful to his country and passed them sensitive information, then he or she at most was simply called an informer or a friend, but if one of their own passed information to others, then they were called traitors, and so on. Thus whenever the CIA started offering some rewards or incentives, one can almost always find some sinister motives behind all this.

- **The Power of White Skin:** Another far more important and serious thing they divulged to us was, what they called White Man Syndrome. They told us that it has been told to them that their white skin was a big advantage, which could be utilised to full benefit whenever caught in a tight situation. Actually many countries of Asia, Middle East, Africa, which had been colonised or remained under the influence of white man for a long time, had developed this complex. These CIA officers had told us (off the record) that many times whenever they were caught in a tight spot in Pakistan, they could easily get away by talking forcefully and threatening to call the governor or some general or someone in high position. Usually that was enough to scare people away. Lt Gen. Akhtar Abdur Rehman understood this very well. He felt that generally Pakistanis were very complex-ridden people and talking to a white man often puts notions in their minds. I had seen this syndrome working many times. I remember one of our officers, who was on leave, on learning that a group of Americans was to visit a training

camp rushed to the camp, saying that he had nothing to do at home, and so he had come to help us. Actually he had come to fraternise with them, and there were numerous such examples. We were, however, also told by them that they felt that the civilians, especially politicians had, comparatively, more complex in this matter. The Westerners, including Americans took a lot of advantage of these complexes. Lt Gen. Akhtar Abdur Rehman had a strict check over this, and during his tenure, procedures were strictly followed. For any meeting to take place, a formal request had to be made through respective headquarters. Once approved, the meeting was usually held in a place approved by the ISI, generally in the ISI headquarters. Individual meetings were never permitted. There had to be at least two officers present at each meeting. Minutes were properly recorded and had to be forwarded immediately. In fact, in those days, our officers normally avoided such meetings and would conduct these meetings very reluctantly. Brigadier Yousaf, I remember vividly, hated such meetings. As far as I remember, the request for meetings was mostly from the Americans and very rarely from our side. This 'white man syndrome' complex is true for many other countries as well. Once we sent a few of our officers to Egypt to get training on Milan anti-tank missiles system, which were of French origin. Two or three American officers from Special Forces also requested us to be included in the training. It was readily agreed by us. But to our surprise, when the group reached Cairo, the American officers were housed in a five star hotel and our officers in a lesser accommodation. Americans were taken for sightseeing and visits, while Pakistanis had mostly to fend for themselves. It left a bad taste, and the Americans themselves felt a bit sheepish about this. To the extent that once when one of our officers got sick, it was only after many requests and much time that the doctor was made available. This could be by chance, but it certainly did not create a good impression on us. All their attention was on the Americans; perhaps Pakistanis did not matter that much to them. Unfortunately, the Milans that were provided by the Egyptians had some technical faults. The Egyptian team did come to Pakistan to assess this defect; they were the same persons who had trained our people. Again it was probably a case of sending a poor lot of ammunition. The Turks had also sent us, to our surprise, WWI vintage arms; those old, water-cooled heavy machine guns leaked

from so many places that one could hang them and take a shower. On the other hand, the Chinese were superb, immaculate, and correct right to the last detail. One of the CIA officers commented thus: 'we thought the Muslim countries would be very honest and reliable to help their brethren, but surprisingly, they seemed less interested in the cause and more interested in making easy money by getting rid of their junk.' Sometimes it was very difficult to cover such actions of our brother Muslim countries.

- **Testing of different weapons and systems:** After the Blowpipe debacle, the British sent us a new version of Blowpipe missile system to be tested. This time the launcher had three missiles on a single platform, instead of one. It was tested in Khost by one of our officers, which was, as far as I know, also a failure. They had developed a small little compact box, a little bigger than mobile phones of today, which would give a beep and a blip anytime an aircraft of Soviet origin was in the air. They had recorded all types of emissions from Soviet aircrafts and fed them in the small box so that whenever an aircraft was in range, the beep or a blip would indicate its presence. Earlier, we had also helped them in recording the emissions of Soviet helicopters and jets. A wonderful device! One could just move around with this device in his pocket or attached to his belt, and the moment any hostile aircraft was in range, the box would give a continuous beep. Somehow the instrument worked only partially, and later on, we never heard or saw it. It was being developed by some civil organisation in America. They even tried to test a crude type of Drone. It consisted of a small TV-type console, where the operator on ground could see what the Drone was seeing, thus enabling him to effectively fly and guide the Drone by signals sent through a joystick from the ground console. The idea was to fly this Drone, which was armed, to the selected area and to crash it on the selected target, acting more like a flying bomb. The only problem was that the control station did not have much range, probably only fifty to sixty Kilometres, so another control station had to be placed at the end limit of the range in case the range to the target was more. The second control station would then take over and guide the Drone for another fifty to sixty kilometres and so on, till the target was reached. Thus if it had to be sent from, say, Jalalabad to Kabul, then it would need at least

three control stations in between. Of course, the operators had to be preferably pilots to fly them. So a number of defected Afghan pilots were selected and trained for this job. They were trained in the USA by the Americans in the presence of the ISI officers. The Americans had the idea of hitting an Il-76 sitting on the tarmac at Kabul. Probably it was the, so-called Texas Chainsaw Drone, a marvel of fibre optics, which allowed signals to be passed in two directions simultaneously, thus allowing the operator to see the camera's image in a monitor and use the joystick to direct the flying bomb wherever he wanted. They eventually managed to launch these Drones from inside Afghanistan. This was the only time when some Americans actually took part in the operation along with Pakistani and Afghan men right inside Afghanistan. They went up to, just short of, Jalalabad City to launch them. Initially it went just as planned. The Drones were launched and took off properly. But they acted soundly only till the second control station took over. Then they malfunctioned and eventually had to be self-destructed. After three or four failed attempts, the Americans were directed by their headquarters to call off the mission and return back to Islamabad. Earlier we had been told by our officers that this system was not going to work. Major Hanif (one of the officers who had been sent to the USA to oversee the Drone training) had told us that the system in its present state was not reliable at all. He was so sure that he told me that he was ready to bet his commission if even one Drone would reach its target. The Americans were duly informed of our apprehensions. But they did not agree with our assessment and also did not like our telling them so. They thought otherwise. However, when it actually failed, all of them had a long face. And we all came back a little bit dejected. We knew that this project had been sponsored by an American civil organisation backed by some Congressmen or senators. And all they wanted was to get this project through somehow, for the reasons mentioned earlier. That is why they did not really care for our recommendations. On the positive side, however, it was not taken as a complete flop. Many things were learned from this failure. And the Americans showed their resolve to continue its development. At least, Colonel Falcon (Retd) was convinced that with some more efforts, this system would eventually work out satisfactorily. In fact, they trained another batch of Afghans who were to go this time, alone, without

any Americans (probably with the intention that if it failed again, the blame could be conveniently put on Afghan incompetence). Somehow this second group could not be launched. We never heard of this system again. That was probably the first and the only time when the Americans were allowed inside Afghanistan by the ISI. This event never made headlines anywhere. The fact is, Pakistan has been doing a lot of service to the Americans, which has never been publicly acknowledged by them. They were also very keen in getting any sort of weapons or equipment of Soviet origin that was being used in Afghanistan. Of special interest to them was, of course, radio or electronic items and especially IFF (identification friend or foe) equipment. Sometimes their requests were more like keeping in with their gung-ho attitude, like something from the thriller movies: ‘ . . . enter the cabin of Mi-24 Hind from the side door, turn towards the nose of the craft, walk three steps forward in the avionics bay till you come to the door of the pilot’s cockpit, look right top of the door, at about shoulder height you will see a small black box, unscrew the four screws of the box, cut the wires and remove that box, and bring it back home safely . . . ’, used to be what some of their memos would read like. These memos were normally given by hand, unsigned, undated, and without any reference numbers, of course, but very carefully kept track of. Many a times we obliged them. They would, in return, often provide us the detailed assessment of many such weapons and equipment but certainly not of every item that was provided to them. Also back in 1985, the GP (global positioning) system was considered very astonishing and modern technology. The ISI soon had mortars of Spanish origin which used this technology with the help of American Navigation Satellites to deliver repeated rounds at the target accurately. The ISI teams had used this technology long time back. Once they explained to us about a very special project they were working on. They were trying to perfect a system by which they would be able to override the transmissions of a TV station and thus beam their own doctored transmissions which would seem to be emanating from the targeted TV station. Thus at least theoretically they would be able to beam their own programmes, say, from Kabul TV station which would appear to the general viewers as if the programmes were being telecast from genuine Kabul TV. With their ability to manipulate speeches and

words of different leaders, this can be a very powerful psy-warfare weapon. However, they never tested this system till the time I was there.

- **Psychological Aspects:** While working with them, we realised that they always had and gave lot of credence to psychological aspects of things. They believed strongly in using the media for influencing the mind, whether domestic or foreign. The common American people are simple, very gullible, and good-natured, but under great influence of their media, they believe whatever their government tells them and can thus be easily manipulated. In Pakistan, however, the common man and the government do not enjoy this kind of trust.
- I remember that once after a lengthy meeting, while waiting for the transport to arrive, we were having some informal chat with the station chief. During the talk, I mentioned that the perception in Pakistan is that the American ambassador behaves and acts more like the British viceroy in the good old colonial days. At this the station chief, Mr Harry L. Weatherbee, if I remember well (who had taken over from Mr Bearden), simply remarked that 'Americans and especially the CIA usually get more credit than they deserve. This perception which is probably created by some people in Pakistan with vested interests is working to American advantage only. Pakistani people, especially politicians are themselves hyping that nothing can be done without American approval. Later on, over a period of time, this perception, if not corrected will grow so strong that it might become a reality.'
- They had also once told us that one decent way to destroy an institution is to change its head very often; that way, continuity is broken and confusion sets in. Something we witnessed later on being practiced at the ISI. In the later years, the command at the top in the ISI was changed so frequently that continuity had been affected somewhat. Between 1990 to 1993 almost four DGs, ISI, were changed. Lt Gen. Shamsur Rehman Kallu (Retd) was removed in 1990 and replaced by Lt Gen. Asad Duranni, who in 1992 was replaced by Lt Gen. Javed Nasir, who was then replaced by Lt Gen. Ashraf Qazi in 1993, and so on. In fact, during this time

the government had also changed a number of times, and every government had brought in their own favourites, for whatever reasons. It was done at so fast a pace that it would have done a lot of damage to the ISI, at least as far as the conceptual thinking of this organisation was concerned. Later on, we learned that a number of postings were also done under outside pressure. The Americans had particular interest in these things, and they did seem to have connections or links in the right places to ensure such manipulations. They indeed had by now started to feel threatened by the ISI's growing capability and reputation. So this was the first step taken by them. It was rumoured that Lt Gen. Javed Nasir was removed by the then caretaker government of Pakistan only at the behest of the CIA. They just hated to see a bearded fellow, fanatically religious (according to them), as head of the ISI.

We had also noticed them, at times, trying to make a psychological impact with theatrics and dramatics. When Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited the USA in June 1989 on her first state visit, she was given an unusual briefing by William Webster, (the CIA director) in Blair House (official state guest house for the president of USA). During this briefing, she was shown some films apparently taken of centrifuges in Kahuta and then shown a model of a nuclear device, which they said was the exact replica of a nuclear weapon which had been prepared by Pakistani scientists and engineers and knowledge of which was being kept secret from her by the military. They had decided that simply telling her that Pakistan had a nuclear device may not have that much of an impact, and so a model was prepared to create an impression and dramatise things. Apparently this 'show and tell' type of briefing was done with following aims to impress upon her that the USA was aware of everything that happened in Pakistan and nothing was hidden from them, to tell her that the military was keeping things secret from her and not telling her everything, to create some mistrust between the military or ISI and her government. Probably working on one of the intelligence maxims, 'To create mistrust between friends, create a doubt.' The CIA had done it quite well this time. Benazir Bhutto felt bad about this, and she did complain about it. This was not the first time they had tried this method. Earlier they had tried it in the 1980s during President Reagan's time. The Deputy Director General, CIA, Lt Gen. Vernon Walters (who was working as a roving ambassador) had been sent to President Zia with a blueprint of the Pak Bomb, which the CIA claimed had been stolen

from Dr A. Q. Khan's hotel room by some foreign intelligence agency and then passed on to them along with some satellite photographs of Kahuta. However, they were not much successful then. Zia is claimed to have said, 'This can't be a nuclear installation, maybe it is a goat shed.' The US ambassador to Pakistan, Mr Ronald Speirs, recalled that the drawing looked more like something from a science fiction magazine. It was an amateurish attempt. Brigadier Yousaf had also narrated to us how he was taken to the CIA's sabotage school, in an aircraft, which had all the curtains tightly drawn, and flew aimlessly to while away the time, thus trying to give the impression of a long flight. On the ground, the car that transported him to the office was also completely shut so that no one could see outside. Similarly when Major Aleem and his men had to be taken to the launch site of the Drones, somewhere in the USA, they were taken in an old rickety DC-3 type aircraft. When enquired as to why this type of aircraft, they came up with a funny reply: that they did not want it to be detected. Detected by whom and for what purpose? Right in their own country? They just could not explain things properly. It was perhaps in late 1992 that, during one of the discussions, one of the CIA officers commented that their experience in different insurgencies worldwide had shown that the host country always takes away about 20-30 per cent of weapons while only 70-80 per cent reaches the insurgents, and he was sure that Pakistan would also be doing something similar. That was news to us and rather very disturbing. This was shocking, as we used to often joke amongst ourselves that even American mothers would not have been so true to their own sons as was the Training and Operations section of the ISI under Brigadier Janjua and Colonel Imam. The reason was that Colonel Imam felt strongly that what was for Afghan Mujahideen was a trust to us. Whatever came for Afghan 'Jihad' could only be spent on that. It is indeed sad to learn that in one of the books about Afghan wars *Ghost Wars*, it is stated that 'Hart knew that Pakistanis were stealing from the till ...' although he admitted that it was at a very modest and reasonable scale. On the other hand, I was once startled to see, during a routine inspection of one of our warehouses cum storage facilities, a number of 'treasure hunting' gadgets—toys in reality—that are used by children on beaches to detect fallen coins or similar things. These gadgets used to normally cost about a dollar or so in the good old days when we were kids. Strangely, these toys were somehow stacked as mine detectors. Somebody from the USA had really pulled a fast one on us.

No wonder while dealing with America, one should keep in mind a haunting remark made by President Ayub Khan of Pakistan to President

Richard Nixon of the USA in 1964 as quoted in his book, *The Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat and Renewal*, thus:

‘... that it is dangerous to be a friend of the United States;
that it pays to be neutral; and that sometimes
it helps to be an enemy.’

To be fair, it was difficult for the Americans to understand how someone could work so honestly in such a corrupt society. To quote an example when Ojhri Camp blew up, the accounts officer used to have a safe in his office, which used to contain hard cash. That day also it had lot of money stacked in it (normally a couple of millions of rupees). The blast had smashed the safe open, but not even a penny was reported missing, and all the money was accounted for; this despite the fact that the safe remained open, and the money lay littered in the room for the whole day and only the next day it was accounted for. There are rotten eggs everywhere, but the Training and Operations section had an exemplary conduct in this case, which was hard for others to believe. It now seemed that for some uncanny reason, the CIA had made up their mind that the ISI had to be discredited somehow someway.

But perhaps as a reaction, it also got our people thinking. It was argued that the new CIA staff had already a set frame of mind, and they would always blame us for some hanky-panky here and there. Furthermore, they had also told us in rather clear terms that no more weapons were coming for the Mujahideen as they had achieved their aim of ousting the Soviets from Afghanistan. It was only then when we heard terms like ‘negative symmetry’ for the first time. In simple bureaucratic jargon, it meant moratorium on arms shipments. It was more like thank you and goodbye to Pakistan and as its extension to Afghan Mujahideen. It got our staff thinking and worried. This would have certainly left the Mujahideen in a lurch. It was then that it was argued whether it would be wise to save some Stingers, for the American intentions were becoming clear. We knew that they would come handy some day for Afghan Mujahideen. The ISI was in some sort of a dilemma over this. It seems, however, that in the end, the ISI decided against it. But despite all this, the new CIA set-up continued doubting the ISI. It seemed as if the new CIA set-up was just desperate to prove how smart and better they were than their old guard. Probably they were behaving exactly like what some overzealous people do—try to bring discredit to those who had worked before them.

On the other hand, after the new ISI set-up had taken over, a sort of smear campaign was also in the offing, against its officers. It was alleged that the ISI officers had made lot of money by selling Stingers or doing such like things. The new ISI set-up did carry out their investigations in this regard but could not come up with anything worthwhile and the matter was closed as it was wont to.

The Strength of the CIA

Cleverness is not wisdom.

(Euripides)

We had realised that the true American strength lay in their technology, and no doubt they are far ahead in this field. Their ELINT (electronic intelligence) capability was excellent. Every day they would provide us the copy of verbal intercepts of the Afghans and Soviets in our areas of interest. Sometimes it used to be hilarious as it would contain even explicit they had intercepted. Their satellite imaging was excellent. They often showed us the complete roll of certain areas, though they never gave them to us. Their maps and charts were superb and very clear and accurate.

In those days, American C-141 flights used to come to Islamabad off and on. These aircrafts were usually parked in a secluded part of the runway, where it was received by two or three American officers from the embassy and two or three officers from the ISI's logistics section. If Stingers were on board, then I was also there to receive them. These planes often carried some crates which were taken by the Americans probably to their embassy. They had a number of warehouses and safe houses in Islamabad. As to what came in those crates or what went in or out of Pakistan was anybody's guess.

But despite the good atmosphere prevalent, the ISI and the CIA never trusted each other completely; perhaps such attitude is inherent in all similar-like organisations. Apart from those few permanently stationed CIA officers, there were many others who came for short stints. Many were civilians, and quite a few were short-service officers inducted for their expertise in certain matters. Slowly and steadily old officers were posted out and a new breed of CIA officers got in. Somehow they were

different people. We could detect much bias and arrogance in them. They considered themselves as superior, or rather, as our bosses. It seemed that those officers who were seconded to the CIA from the Marines or the Special Forces were now being replaced by hard-core agents and civilians. As all agents do, they doubted everything that was told to them. They were so suspicious that they even doubted that we had lost more than 200 Stinger missiles in the Ojhri Camp blast. It was indeed very strange as the new CIA set-up had suddenly started doubting us in everything. Sometimes they become very obstinate. They once raised hell over whereabouts of seven Stinger-fired tubes which we had presented as souvenirs to old CIA officers (on their own request). In fact, sometimes their behaviour was so obnoxious at times that one felt like paying them back in the same manner. Racism and arrogance could also be detected amongst them. To our surprise, once we even overheard them making fun of Muhammad Ali (ex-world heavyweight boxing champion) only because he was black and had converted to Islam right in our office and in our presence. In fact, a new team of CIA officers was taking over, while at the same time the old ISI team was also being purged out. In 1993, most of the old American officers had been posted out. The new breed that came was certainly different, and it was not comfortable to work with them. This new breed of CIA officers was quite clueless about the Afghan situation and insurgency. They viewed things very differently, and soon whatever good impression we had about them was dispelled.

The Trojan Horse

Coming events cast their shadow before.

(Campbell)

It was in 1989, after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, that the term ‘negative symmetry’, coined by the CIA had come into action. In simple words, it meant that after the weapons and equipment that were in the pipeline got expended, no additional weapons or items would be sent. So whatever we had got, that was it. By 1990, the CIA had started pressing us to retrieve the Stingers from the Mujahideen.

So many Stingers roving around without any control was a constant source of worry for not only the CIA but for the ISI as well. With so many terrorists and countries working against Pakistan, the CIA’s interest in retrieving Stingers was welcomed by the ISI. We made a comprehensive plan to retrieve these missiles. Initially, it was decided to use our influence to get them back free of any cost and, at a later stage, use some incentives. These things take time to materialise but to get weapons back from Afghans is a very difficult proposition. However, we did manage to get some Stingers back, free of cost, and handed them over to the Americans. The CIA was very happy and appreciated these efforts. But they seemed to be in extreme urgency to get them all back. Eventually, they started to offer incentives in the shape of hard cash or some items like a vehicle or two or any other thing directly to the Afghan Mujahideen. Soon it was more or less made like an open market, with the Afghan Mujahideen raising their stakes higher and higher. The Americans for some reason were in undue haste to get the Stingers back. In those days, we could not really understand the urgency by the CIA in obtaining the Stingers, and the amount of money they were ready to spend, rather lavishly in these

matters. We thought that they were actually very simple people and were spending money foolishly. But it is only now clear to us that they were not foolish or prodigal at all but were in fact very clever and smart, as the Afghan and Iraq wars later on proved.

Meanwhile, the ISI finally launched this massive operation to retrieve all or as many Stingers as possible from inside Afghanistan. This operation was code named Trojan Horse. The ISI offices in Peshawar and Quetta were given additional responsibility to retrieve them, and they all got busy. Often the CIA had their own contacts, but they were careful not to get themselves involved in the actual retrieving operation. It was very risky as the CIA covert operations had many drawbacks. They would tell us to meet at such a place, a man dressed in such and such clothes, and once located, we should approach him and ask him a specific question; he would reply in certain words, which would establish his identity, and then he would show a torn note. The other half of the note would be given to us, and if they matched, then we could proceed to his place and then retrieve the missiles and then get out quickly. Nothing went according to the plan; often, the timings were not adhered to. The Afghans have no notion of time; they could be many hours earlier at the RV or many hours late. Though, often their behaviour would point them out from miles away. Occasionally they changed their plans on their own because they had seen their rivals in the area. These mountain people have lot of vendettas and blood feuds. We often landed in lot of trouble; sometimes we were caught by our own levies and border guards, who naturally thought that we were suspicious people. Once I landed into a den of cut-throats and bandits. They had even lured my men into a compound which had only one entrance and exit door, ostensibly for a cup of tea. Luckily, out of blue, another 'mafroor' (absconder) from somewhere came to our rescue, who had mistaken me for someone else and had then managed a quick cover-up and helped us to get away, but then that's another long story. These were daily happenings which the CIA was never aware of (or perhaps they actually were), as they had left this entire risky task for the ISI. Soon we found out Americans had involved many others in this retrieval business. So at one time, the CIA had involved the ISI, and then they had their own network and sources which worked independently. They had direct access with the Afghan Mujahideen commanders. In fact, at some later time, their CIA station chief, Gary C. Schroen, had even visited Ahmed Shah Masood and requested him to round up as many Stingers as he could, thus allowing him to earn cash by selling the Stinger stockpile as a middleman. He was also promised that

when sufficient missiles had been accumulated, he would be sent a C-130 clandestinely to retrieve them.

But to be fair, the CIA, mostly trusted and relied on the ISI for the retrieval business. In return they paid handsomely to the Mujahideen commanders and also paid \$5,000 as service charges to Pakistan for each retrieved missile. As the demand for Stingers grew, so did the price of each retrieved missile. Initially, we had got some absolutely free as a goodwill gesture from some of the Mujahideen commanders. We knew that it was only a short-term measure; then the missiles were got in exchange of a pickup truck or jeeps or medicines. Then as the Mujahideen got wiser, the ISI started paying hard cash to them as incentive (this money of course came from the CIA). Initially the going price for one Stinger missile was about one million rupees, then it went to two millions, and by the time I left the ISI in 1993, the going price in some cases had reached almost as high as three million rupees per missile. But the interesting thing was, as we learned later, that according to the American media, the going price for each Stinger Missile was reported to have been between \$80,000 to \$150,000 (approximately between Rs 2.5 million to Rs 4.6 million at the time). For all I know, the ISI was never paid that kind of amount by CIA. If true, then it appears that someone in the CIA was making hay while the sun was shining. As usual, many in Pakistan started accusing the ISI and the army, something which was later on picked up by many politicians, civilians, and even the Pakistani media. It well could have been purposely started to put the Pakistani government and the ISI on the defensive and to divert the attention from their (CIA) side. After all, we knew how the CIA at times managed to bulldoze their decisions upon the ISI. So strong had this perception taken root that many DGs, ISI, who came, during and after 1993, were obsessed with this Stinger business and would often prod old officers as to who was selling them and how they were sold. But no one was ever charged for this nor was anything ever found against anyone.

Till early 1993, there was still reasonable trust and faith between the CIA and the ISI, and it had been beneficial to both the organisations. They kept us informed and used to warn us about fake sellers, mostly crackpots, from the USA, posing as Stinger experts, out to fleece someone, somehow. We learned some shocking things also from them, like one of our most trusted Mujahid commander, who had been amongst the first ones to receive the Stingers, had actually gone to the American consulate in Peshawar to offer them Stingers for sale, directly and quietly. This was in the early nineties. At that time, the CIA and the ISI worked closely together, and the CIA duly

informed the ISI about this. However, one thing was very clear; the actual handling of the money was done at higher headquarters of the ISI and the CIA, that is at the official level. The Training and Operations section dealt only with the actual retrieval business, the most difficult and dangerous part. Thus from June 1992 till June 1993, in four special US flights, we had backhauled about 69 grip stocks and 242 Stinger missiles with about 470 or so Stinger-fired tubes, amongst many other things.

It was perhaps in 1993, when old officers were being purged out, and mostly new officers had taken over on both sides, that the American pressure for the retrieval of Stingers increased manifold. Of course, the CIA's urgency and desperation in this retrieval business was obvious to all. But to what purpose? It was not yet clear. It is only now from hindsight after seeing the Iraq and Afghan wars that we can guess at what the American intentions were all along behind such urgency.

For all that I know, 'Operation Trojan Horse' has not only been continuing, but it has been further enhanced and now includes many and other items besides Stingers in its list. It now perhaps includes other types of missiles and weapons also. By 1995, according to the CIA, only about 370 Stingers were left in Afghanistan. The ISI may have done a great service to the entire world by retrieving these missiles and preventing its falling into wrong hands.

Epilogue

*The West won the world not by the superiority of the ideas
or values or religion, but rather by 'its' superiority
in applying organized violence . . .*

(Samuel P. Huntington; Clash of Civilizations)

There is no doubt that militarily speaking the introduction of the Stingers in the Afghanistan war had proved to be the turning point in ousting the Russians from Afghanistan. By the end of 1985 and early 1986, the Afghan Mujahideen were taking a terrible beating from the air and were apparently on the verge of losing the war.

The situation was getting so desperate that once some American officials, who were visiting a training camp, were asked, rather tersely, by one of the Mujahideen commander as to when they would be able to get some 'ground to aircraft missiles, instead of the usual ground to air missiles'. He meant that these existing missiles like the Blowpipes or SA-7s flew in the air only and rarely went towards the aircraft. They now wanted a missile that actually went towards the aircraft instead of flying in the air only. He had made his point. In the end, we all had a big laugh about it. This phrase had soon become a catchword in our circle and was often quoted in our discussions.

I had also noticed that soon after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, a sort of vile campaign had started by some writers and so-called analysts and weapon experts (knowingly or unknowingly) against the Mujahideen and their deft handling of the Stingers. With the purpose, it seemed to deny them their due credit. These writers tried to create the impression that Stingers played no significant role, and the Soviets withdrew only because of economic constraints. The data they published

was often not accurate, and they had no information or background to the aerial warfare in Afghanistan and had no access to the information generally required for an accurate assessment. They mostly worked on their assumptions only. There was no authentic analysis about the Stinger's performance available in the market, not even in the military libraries (of at least in Pakistan) which could give the true picture. Thus I was egged on to write about it in as true a perspective as possible about how and why things happened as they did. Perhaps it can serve some purpose to serious analysts and military thinkers.

Historically, Pakistan Army, like many other armies of the world, is an infantry-oriented army, and the air aspect was not of much importance to them in the early days of the war. This may appear strange despite the fact that we had the examples of Arab-Israeli War of 1967 in which the Israeli air force had almost totally decimated the Arab forces on the ground as the Arab forces had no viable defence against Israeli air force at that time. However, it goes to the credit of the Arabs that they learned their lesson well and soon overcame this shortcoming by inducting a large number of shoulder-fired AA missiles in their army. Thus in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, they countered Israeli air force very effectively. It is but obvious that in any future war, our enemy whosoever they may be, will depend heavily on air-delivered weapons. This fact had been very aptly highlighted by Alexander Graham Bell in his famous quote: 'The nation that secures control of the air will ultimately control the world.' The recent drone attacks have only proved that point. In fact, in future conflicts, the air defence now has not only to counter enemy aircrafts but unmanned aerial vehicles as well. Any future conflict will start with massive use of unmanned/manned aerial vehicles and high-altitude bombings with smart weapons.

The Afghan War certainly brought a great qualitative change in the Pakistan Army's thinking, which has matured rapidly. The need to counter air power from ground was felt very strongly during this war. With the introduction of Stingers, the Mujahideen could roam freely in the countryside without any fear, and it cost the Soviets tremendously in men and material, in fact, so much that they could not sustain the casualties and finally decided to call it quits.

There is no doubt that the introduction of Stinger in Afghanistan had proved to be a turning point in favour of Afghan Mujahideen. But a few questions in some people's mind still remained. Was it only the technological advancement of the Stingers that had turned the tide? What about the training, dedication, and resilience of the Afghan nation?

What part did the conviction and vision of the leadership play, which made this 'twentieth century miracle' possible? How about the faith and dedication of a small band of unknown and common soldiers who worked as trainers and advisers without any thoughts for rewards or recognition? Perhaps it was the blend of all these factors that had made the Stinger Saga what it is.

Role of Stingers apparently seems to have ended in Afghanistan, but there is, inter alia, one very important lesson one can learn from this for preparing the country against future nefarious designs of an enemy. That is, that the defending forces should develop an intrinsic capability of striking back at any threat from the skies. It would be a sort of extension of Stingers, replaced perhaps by some better version. For any future conflict with Pakistan, it will start with a massive dose of air-delivered weapons.

I have no doubt that the Stinger saga would live on, as playing a pivotal role as guidance in the overall defensive mechanisms of this or any country.



Lieutenant Colonel Mahmood was born in Eldoret (Kenya) in British East Africa in 1947. The family moved to Pakistan in early fifties when his father decided that there was no justification to live in a foreign land when they now had a country of their own. He was commissioned in an Air Defence Regiment of Pakistan Army in 1971 and saw action with his regiment in the 1971 Indo-Pak War. During his normal service tenure, he held different appointments and did various courses and also attended Air Defence Gunnery Staff Course in Malir.

In 1984, while serving in an air defence unit in Kahuta (a small town near Islamabad which houses some nuclear assets of Pakistan), he was posted to the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence). He remained there for more than eight years continuously. In the ISI he was posted to the Afghan Bureau which was supporting the Afghan 'Jihad' at that time. It was here when the author saw firsthand the plight of the Afghan people and the destruction and misery brought by the Soviets on Afghanistan that transformed his thinking and things changed for him and many others like him. The no-nonsense and serious mission-oriented atmosphere of the ISI, the confidence reposed in them by their superiors, and the free hand given to them had changed these men who were considered as average officers by the army.

In 1986, he was selected by the ISI as in charge of a small training team that was being sent to the USA to get training on Stinger missiles. On his return, he was made in charge of the Stinger section, which was responsible for imparting training to Afghan Mujahids (freedom fighters). In addition, this section was also given the task of planning and fighting the air war of Afghanistan. He was the witness to and saw the effects of this weapon and the devastation it caused to the Soviet/Afghan air power to an extent that it became untenable for the Soviets to stay in Afghanistan. His services in this regard were also recognised by the Government of Pakistan.

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